Columns
Spirituality

A woman with a baby strapped on her back fetches water from a well in Epworth, a poor neighborhood on the outskirts of Harare, Zimbabwe, June 15, 2022.(AP/Tsvangirayi Mukwazhi)

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Welcome to Theologians' Corner, where each week a different woman theologian from around the world offers a fresh reflection on the Sunday readings.

Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

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There are moments when following God feels less like consolation than contradiction. We pray faithfully, try to do what is right, yet find ourselves misunderstood, disappointed or weary. Sometimes we wonder why choosing the path of love and truth seems to make life harder rather than easier. In those moments, today's readings remind us that we are not alone. Christ walks beside us, even when the road is difficult.

Jeremiah knows this experience well. His words are raw, honest and deeply human. He feels deceived, mocked and exhausted. He wants to remain silent, to walk away from the burden of speaking God's truth, but he cannot. God's word burns within him "like a fire shut up in my bones."

Perhaps we know something of Jeremiah's struggle. We, too, grow weary of doing what is right. We wonder whether speaking the truth is worth the cost or why faith sometimes seems to make life harder rather than easier. Jeremiah teaches us that lament is not the opposite of faith. It is often the language of hearts that continue to seek God, even in disappointment.

We see this struggle all around us. Women and men who stand for justice are ridiculed. Young people who reject corruption are called naive. Families carry the burden of unemployment, displacement, violence, illness or uncertainty. Across the world, countless people continue to choose compassion over indifference, truth over convenience and peace over revenge, often paying a costly price.

Faith does not exempt us from suffering. Sometimes it leads us right into the heart of it. Yet it also assures us that we never walk alone.

The psalmist responds to Jeremiah's anguish not with easy answers but with longing: "My soul thirsts for you." When answers are few, our deepest need is not explanations but God's presence. Even in the wilderness, God remains our faithful companion.

Paul echoes this invitation: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your minds." Transformation begins not by changing everyone around us but by allowing Christ to reshape the way we think, love and live.

In a world that often measures success by wealth, influence or achievement, the Gospel offers another way. It calls us to lives marked by compassion, integrity, generosity and faithful love. This transformation is rarely dramatic. It grows quietly as Christ forms us in our homes, workplaces, communities and churches.

Jesus now invites us to take another step.

Immediately after Peter proclaims Jesus as the Messiah, he recoils when Jesus speaks of suffering and the cross. Peter longs for a Messiah of triumph without vulnerability, glory without sacrifice. Perhaps we recognize something of ourselves in Peter.

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We, too, can prefer a faith that promises comfort, certainty and success. Yet Jesus gently redirects our expectations. Discipleship is not about avoiding the cross but about walking with him through it.

The Gospel never glorifies suffering or asks us to seek it. Jesus healed the sick, fed the hungry, welcomed the excluded and restored human dignity wherever he went. But he refused to stop loving when love became costly. The cross is where faithful love led him.

To take up our cross, then, is not simply to endure life's hardships. It is to choose love when hatred seems easier, truth when lies appear more profitable, forgiveness when resentment feels justified and hope when despair whispers that nothing can change.

Across the world, ordinary disciples carry such crosses every day. Some women walk long distances to fetch water for their families, while others balance work, caregiving and countless unseen responsibilities. Some young girls courageously resist being forced into early marriages. Many young people reject corruption, exploitation and easy gain despite the personal cost. Parents sacrifice so their children may flourish. Teachers, health workers and religious sisters quietly serve communities with limited resources. Migrants rebuild their lives in unfamiliar lands, while peacemakers continue to build bridges where conflict threatens to divide. Countless people lovingly care for elderly parents, lonely neighbors and those living with illness or mental distress.

These quiet acts of faithful love rarely make headlines, yet they reveal the face of Christ among us.

Jesus' question still echoes today: "What will it profit them to gain the whole world but forfeit their life?"

In an age shaped by endless achievement, relentless consumption and carefully curated online identities, his words invite us to pause. What are we chasing? What kind of people are we becoming? Are we accumulating possessions while neglecting relationships? Are we protecting our comfort while overlooking our neighbor's suffering?

The paradox of the Gospel remains beautifully true: Whoever loses life for Christ's sake will find it.

This is not a call to diminish ourselves. It is an invitation to discover that life becomes fullest when it is given away in love. Every act of kindness, every courageous stand for justice, every word of reconciliation and every quiet prayer offered for another becomes part of Christ's healing work in the world.

Jeremiah's burning heart, the psalmist's thirst, Paul's call to transformation, and Jesus' invitation to take up the cross all converge in one simple truth: God never asks us to walk a path that Christ has not already walked. The one who calls us is the one who walks beside us.

As we begin a new week, perhaps the question is not whether discipleship will cost us something. It surely will. The deeper question is whether we trust that the love of Christ is worth more than anything we might lose.

The road of discipleship is never walked alone. Christ, who carried the cross before us, still walks beside us today. Even when love is costly, it is never wasted. Every step taken in faith, every act of compassion, and every quiet yes to God becomes part of God's work of renewing the world.

May we have the courage to follow him — not because the road is easy, but because he walks it with us and leads us to the fullness of life.

This story appears in the **Theologians' Corner** feature series. View the full series.