

When someone adamantly refuses to believe an obvious truth, what do you do?

If you are the *El Paso Times* newspaper and a person writes a Letter to the Editor claiming that the contrails of condensed water vapor left by jets that frequently crisscross the skies of El Paso are really chemical trails that are a part of a government plot to poison us, you simply publish the letters over and over again.

But there must be a better way to deal with someone who refuses to believe an obvious truth!

If you are Jesus and you have a group of disciples that can not comprehend what it means to be the Christ, then you lead the group most in need of remediation up a mountain where they will first see you in blazing glory. That blazing glory fits right into these disciples' preconceived notions that following you will bring them nothing but glory, power and wealth. *Teacher, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings.* For Peter, God's kingdom on earth has now come in a blaze of glory, and he is ready to set up the posts to administer that kingdom. In that kingdom, Peter sees himself as one of the administrators who will be at the center of power.

But then from the cloud comes the voice that upsets the disciples' apple cart and is the best way to deal with disciples' refusal to believe the truth about Jesus: *This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him!* And what is it that these disciples have refused to hear and believe?

They have closed their ears and their minds to Jesus' words that he must undergo great suffering, be rejected and be killed, and after three days rise again. Peter and James and John have refused to hear Jesus' call to discipleship: *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.*

Jesus led his circle of non-believing disciples, or should we say Jesus drug them by the scruff of the neck, not so that they would experience the glory on the mountain, but so that hearing the voice of God they might learn that the glory of God is in the Cross. That's right; the glory of God is not in power

and might, not in wonders and miracles, but in suffering and death on the Cross.

And now maybe we need to hear that voice from the cloud also: *This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him!* Our vision of the good life doesn't have a lot of room for denying oneself. The world we live in says just the opposite – that the good life is found in stuff and the more stuff you have the better your life will be. It's the message we hear from earliest childhood. Children today are growing up with that message being drummed into them over and over again by the 25,000 TV ads watched each year by the average child and the 17 billion dollars companies spend on advertising to kids each year.

But yet in the midst of all those flashy, seductive ads, Jesus continues to issue his call to discipleship: *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.*

Deny! In our culture we are interested in success, not sacrifice; in accumulating, not altruism; in satisfying our cravings, not in taking up a cross.

In 1960, Greek author Nikos Kazantzakis' novel *The Last Temptation of Christ* was published in English. In that very controversial novel, Kazantzakis had Jesus in Jerusalem, the cross looming right before him, being tempted by what we would describe as the good life. Jesus asked: *Why don't I just go back to Nazareth, marry, have a family, take up carpentry again and get out of this?*

If Jesus had done that, turned his back on the cross, slipped out of town, gone back to Nazareth, married, had children, and lived like everybody else, do you think we would be here today? If Jesus had denied the cross, rather than himself, would we be marking Katelyn's forehead with a cross this morning? If Jesus had allowed himself to be led from the cross, would we be gathering Wednesday evening to have all of our foreheads marked with a cross of ashes?

Thank God then that Jesus was led to the Cross! Thank God that Jesus leads us to the Cross and through that Cross to LIFE itself! Now let us once again take up our cross and follow Jesus!