

MAGNOLIA MINDS: Deny yourself

By Lindsey Williams

Last night I had a dream, between wakefulness and sleep, where the last version of myself looked at the current form of me.

Brow furled, she sighed frustratedly, “Don’t you worry you’re straying too far from yourself? Don’t you fear that you will never be the same *you* of yesterday? Don’t you think you’re stretching yourself thin between people? What *happened* to you? Come back and be like *me* again.”

A firm voice spoke clearly in my ear, “*Deny yourself.*”

“No,” I responded to her, “I can’t go back with you. I’ve changed too much. To try to look like you again would only harm me.”

“And what of these scars?” She points to my hands – even to my feet. “You keep walking away on this road and you’ll only gain more!”

An affirming word calmed my heart, “*Take up your cross.*”

“I gained these scars from loving people,” I replied to her. “They are salved with His forgiveness and mercy, like how Jesus cured me of my self-inflicted sins. I can’t go back with you. I’ve been loved too much by Him. To keep all His love for myself would only negate its purpose.”

“You’re *different*,” she mumbled, disgusted. “I would never let people walk over me. You have your own burdens to worry about, and you’re just humiliating yourself. If you come with me, you’ll feel freer and find yourself with all the time in the world.”

“I *did* follow you – *for too long*,” I resolved. “Your road led to anxiety. Your way winds alone. Your path put me first in

line – *for the fire.*”

Then with the same words spoken to Matthew, Simon, Andrew, James, and John, Christ called out – *“Follow Me.”*

“Listen, my soul! Listen, my flesh so swift to persuade me away! His road streams of peace. His way He has walked before and walks with me now. His path puts me last, to receive the reward of His eternal presence at the finish. I can’t go back with you. I have been changed too much. To look like Christ is my great ambition now.

“Listen, my soul! The glory of heaven, the Son of God, wore a crown of thorns and a human body scorned; it was my sins which nailed Him to a cross. The glory of heaven, the Prince of Peace, died demeaned and derided in the dirt when it should have been me. The glory of heaven, the Lord of All, crushed death beneath His wounded heel to save me from an eternity where I should drown, burn, and cry alone with me! Then the glory of heaven, my Savior Jesus, rose from the dead to the right hand of God the Father to offer His glorious inheritance to me!

“Why then would I go back? If I should live for myself, I will die because of me. But if I should lose myself and find Christ, I have truly found Life, and become more and more the person I was meant to be: a Christ-like child of God.”

Jesus said to His disciples, *“Whoever wants to be My disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for Me will find it.”* Matthew 16:24-25 (NIV).

I pray you, too, can say to yourself, *“I can’t go back with you. I have been changed too much.”*

Williams is a writing specialist for The Baptist Record/Communications Department of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board and a member of First Church, Jackson.