

Sermon: Take up Your Cross

Scripture: Philippians 3:17 – 4:1, Mark 8:31-38

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On our Second Sunday in Lent, our New Testament reading comes from Philippians 3:17 – 4:1. In this passage, Paul appeals to his readers at Philippi to imitate him, for his life's model is Christ, and we all need to be like Christ. Let us hear the Word of the Lord, who is calling us to model our lives to Christ.

Philippians 3:17 – 4:1

<sup>17</sup> Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. <sup>18</sup> For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. <sup>19</sup> Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. <sup>20</sup> But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>21</sup> He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

Today's gospel reading comes from Mark 8:31-38. In this heart of the gospel of Mark, Jesus no longer uses the parables to teach his disciples and the crowds but speaks directly for the clarity of what is to come and to share the ministry that is for all of them. This morning the same message is being said is for us to hear and to act upon.

Mark 8:31-38

<sup>31</sup> Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup> He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup> But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

<sup>34</sup> He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. <sup>36</sup> For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? <sup>37</sup> Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? <sup>38</sup> Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Let us pray. Holy and passionate Lord, whose love is so much, that if the water of the Oceans were ink and the sky were like the parchment to write on, there wouldn't be enough ink nor paper to write about the grandeur of your love for all of us. And yet, as we read your Word and speak your message, may your truth be illuminated that our hearts would be opened, our eyes to be opened, and our ears be able to hear your voice and to know that it is indeed you who is speaking to us this morning. May

the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts to be pleasing to you, our Rock and Redeemer.

This morning, we are continuing our sermon series aligned with our Lenten devotions, *Lent in Plain Sight* by Rev. Jill J. Duffield. This week, we begin the third week of Lent looking at the cross. What used to be a symbol for death, it transformed into something new, to symbolize not only the miracle and the passion and love of Christ, but also our faith, that we, too, remember by looking, wearing, and identifying ourselves as Christians. I want to give special thanks to Bob Fox, who has prepared crosses for us that we may have a cross that we can take with us throughout the week, remembering how we are called to “deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow [Christ].”

Today’s message is a continuation of what Dr. Kieffer already gave us in her message last week. In her sermon, she exposed what was being asked of Jesus when the devil tempted him to change a rock into bread after fasting 40 days and 40 nights. The devil was asking Christ to deny his purpose, deny his intentions, deny his humanity, and rather embrace his divine self. Yet, Christ the King is THE perfect leader, who leads by example and shows us that he rather deny his divinity and chose to show us how much he loved the world and us. He embraced the ministry of reconciliation through love, to be a Savior to those who denied him, and to empathize and to live among us, the mortals, to undergo great suffering, to die on the cross, and to overcome death on all our behalf.

Today’s passage and the cross throughout the Season of Lent should nudge us to think critically about what Jesus told Peter in Mark’s gospel: Are we living our lives and setting our minds not on divine things but on human things? How often do we measure our successes based on a heavenly treasure versus a worldly treasure? It is not too difficult to understand that what Christ is asking us by telling us that we need to deny ourselves, it means that we need to unchain from our self-interests and know that we have a purpose is much bigger, a purpose is to make a difference than ourselves. We are not called to have a Disney dreams: where a dream is wish your heart makes and one can make it come true if one had enough courage pursue them. The Bible is telling us that we are called to have Godly dreams: a type of dream that it is too small if we can obtain it through our hands. We need to act on the dreams that are too grand to achieve it for ourselves but that is only achievable through the help of God Almighty. A dream beyond ourselves and to be a part of bringing God’s kingdom here on earth one step closer to reality. That is what we are called for, that is type of dream we should have, and that is purpose why we need to deny ourselves.

Then Christ asks us, challenges us, and dares us to take up your cross and follow him. Throughout the history, some took it literally and became martyrs for the gospel where they died on the cross. Others have taken it metaphorically, by accepting burdensome tasks of being righteous and bringing justice to the world, facing many criticisms and hardships. Yet as we make close observation what it means to deny ourselves, the truth that God works through us to do God’s will, then taking up the cross should be in a similar fashion. As simple as it might sound and as foundational it is for our own faith, the basic question Christ is asking us this morning when he challenges us to take up our cross and follow him is in this one question: can we carry the message of the cross wherever we go, whenever it may be, to whomever we are being call? Being a visible witness is an identity is not a part-time job. As we critically look through our own lives – through the lens of Season of Lent – let us be honest, vulnerable, and share that truth with the Lord that sometimes we do not want that burden. But God is simply asking us, through Jesus’ word this morning, could we be a visible witness, an ambassador of the Ministry of Reconciliation to the world from the heavenly kingdom? Are we worthy to promote

the gospel on behalf of the citizens of heaven? – the saints who has gone before us, saints who will come after us, the saints whom we share pews and lives with at this very moment?

One of the hymns we enjoy at Westminster is the Summons: Will you let me be your servant. If I take the first phrase of the hymn and switch it into a question form, it becomes this: do we exemplify the gospel in our daily walk that others would let us be a servant, would others let us be as Christ to them? Our passion and desire of wanting to be a servant and wanting to be like Christ to others is there and is not questionable. But do others see us in the same light? Are we taking up our own cross, so that others can see on each of our face the fingerprint and DNA of God? Are we exemplifying the love of Christ?

For far too long, we Christians have been known to be a hypocrites. We have been called many things because our desire of wanting to be a follower of Christ does not match up with how we live our lives. Gandhi once said, “I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.” The gospel, the good news, brings life eternal to all. Yet, when we fail to take up our own cross and fail to live it out, we dampen the message because we are the living and breathing examples of the Bible that we carry in our hearts; the life-giving source that we have our faith founded in and the trust, and that every prayer we have learned comes through the Bible and yet, the world sees that message through us. There are many of us within the greater church who would agree with this statement, as the church was their source of disappointment and pain.

So where do we go from here? And that is the mercy of Christ. God covers all of us in God’s love, that we put on Christ – That every failure, every mistake, every imperfections in us is covered in God’s grace and in Christ’s name we can do all thing, that Christ has given us the power through the Holy Spirit to intercede on our behalf to show the world the marvelous light through each and every one of us. Because we are set apart and our faith is deemed enough, we are God’s miracles, and that we can call on God and say it is only through the cross, it is only through your help, it is only through your love that all these things which seem impossible will made possible – the hearts that were hardened will be softened because God, you are with us.

Our Lenten journey this year started with a reminder that we are a dust, that we will return to dust and will not be able to carry anything earthly with us to our eternal, heavenly home. Last week, we were reminded that we do not live by bread alone, and we trust in the eternal bread of life that is in Christ. Today, Christ who died for us, suffered for us, continues to pray for us, who risen for us, extends his hands to each and every one of us today, and reminds us ‘I have not forgotten you. Pick up your cross and follow me.’ So let us do that, not out of our (im)perfections, not simply with our desires, but knowing that God will do tremendous, incomprehensible, mysterious things when we hold on to our faith, our cross, and walk humbly with him. So be it. Amen.