



SAINT LUKE'S

"THE WAY OF THE CROSS"

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT
YEAR B

GENESIS 17:1-7,15-16

PSALM 22:22-30

ROMANS 4:13-25

MARK 8:31-38

A SERMON BY THE REV. CAROLINE STACEY

FEBRUARY 25, 2018

Jesus' offers us two very challenging truths today. They are Divine truths - not obvious to human thinking - and only the Holy Spirit can help us understand and embrace them. The first is connected to Jesus Messiahship. Peter has just confessed Jesus is the Messiah two verses earlier.¹ Jesus acknowledges that as the truth. However, Jesus does not call himself the Messiah, and he asks his disciples not to talk it up. Jesus instead describes himself as the Son of Man. Not because he is isn't the Messiah, but because "Son of Man" describes the kind of Messiah Jesus is. Son of Man points to the necessary suffering which Jesus must undergo. Jesus says he *must* suffer trial, crucifixion and death - what some theologians call the "*Law of Suffering*".² Jesus' primary message is the coming of the kingdom of God and the transformation of what can be transformed. Suffering becomes necessary because this world is profoundly in conflict with the kingdom of God. The kingdom of this world we know so well. It is the kingdom that puts Jesus to death; the kingdom that stops at nothing to assert its own will through vengeance and control and violence. There is another more subtle aspect of the kingdom of this world that Jesus points out to us. The kingdom of this world often refuses legitimate suffering - necessary suffering - because it seeks comfort above righteousness and justice and the well-being of others. When the disciples' thinking is not aligned with God's Kingdom, they are of the world. By tempting Jesus to choose an easier way - a way without suffering - a way without a Cross - Peter is tempting Jesus to betray God's kingdom. *Get behind me Satan.*

The second truth is even harder and Jesus speaks plainly, although we

¹ Mark 8:29

² See D.E. Nineham: Saint Mark, among others

may wish he wouldn't. Jesus says – the way of the Cross is your way too. To be my disciple you have to follow me, not just watch and applaud. You have to follow me on this path of necessary suffering for transformation. Under Roman law, condemned criminals had to carry their own cross to their place of execution. As Bonhoeffer says, and as he lived, *when Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die.*³ The fact that most of us don't get killed for following Jesus is not because Jesus is exaggerating or being overly dramatic. It is because we are fortunate to live in the age and place that we do. It is only by God's grace that we have the luxury of floating in and out of the path of faith and not have to choose Jesus *or* life in this world. The truth that is often veiled from us, that we are sheltered by grace from having to confront, is that whenever we confess to Jesus *You are the Messiah*, every time that recognition happens, we enter the way of the Cross. To say Jesus is the Messiah is inseparable from saying: We walk the Way of the Cross. We carry our cross to the places of our self-denial, to those places where we give our lives to and for others. When we do this, although it may not feel very glamorous or spectacular, we are participating in nothing less than God's work of transforming the world into the kingdom of God. It's not *only* Christians who live sacrificial lives of service, of course. Jesus never says that God *only* works through his followers.⁴ However, we who bear the name of Jesus are specific and intentional in why we do what we do. Jesus is our foundation, vision and energy. Simply put, we try to live Jesus' love in our lives.

What might this mean for us in our lives today? At a bare minimum it

³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer: The Cost of Discipleship

⁴ The readings today point to Abraham as a person God works through, centuries before Jesus' birth. And as John the Baptist says, God can raise children of Abraham from stones.

means that following Jesus is about fidelity, not just feelings and convenience. Fidelity is about choices. Showing up matters. A parishioner in my last parish said: “Faith is about choices. In our family, church is an absolute. It is not a debate. We don’t even think of doing anything else on a Sunday morning unless it is a genuine emergency. Work, sports, sleepovers, bad weather, other activities with family and friends, the beach – *none* of that comes before church”. How counter-cultural that is! Yet God says to us, keep the Sabbath holy to the Lord.⁵ Sunday is for us the first day of the week. First things first. Some folks have to work overnight Saturday or on Sunday, and then an alternative Sabbath is necessary. But for most of us, unless prevented by ill health or other serious cause, people following Jesus begin the week worshiping God in church, here or somewhere else. It is our duty to God, our children, our church and to each other. We don’t come for ourselves alone, we also come to support others in their faith too. Yes, it’s hard for modern families to make church attendance a priority but you bet it matters. Blessings on each of you for making that choice today. Jesus nowhere talks about discipleship as a matter of feelings or convenience. Fidelity - picking up our cross -giving our precious time - is costly.

After the Sabbath day itself, Jesus makes claims on our time the rest of the week. Work responsibilities invade our lives 24/7 if we let them – job creep. We have to *choose* to make time for Jesus; it is unlikely that someone will just hand it to us. We may not know the Parkland families personally but for sure we know others who are suffering.

⁵ eg. Exodus 20:8 ff

Others will need things we can give – time, resources, effort, caring and compassionate action. Our way of the Cross will lead us to many in need, where we have the privilege and responsibility of denying ourselves, to stop and help, as Jesus stopped to help.

There's an open secret about the way of the Cross that we cannot experience until we begin giving ourselves to it – it is pure joy. It is wonderful to be able to serve others! What is more joyful for a human being of any age than making a difference, however small, in this world? Jesus lived this: *for the joy that was set before him, Jesus endured the Cross, scorning its shame.*⁶ Jesus knows this will be true for us too, as we walk the way of the Cross. I encourage you to pick up our Prayer Book sometime and look at all the Collects for Lent, Holy Week and Easter week – the word joy is in nearly every one of those prayers, spliced in right next to the suffering on the Cross. Joy is at the heart of the Way of the Cross. This is why Jesus says that following him and picking up our Cross of service and self-denial in his Name will save our lives. Jesus means now in this life, as well as the next. If we want to know what a really free and abundant and joyful life is like – a life of profound meaning and high purpose and connection to all that is – Jesus says: this is the way. Pick up your Cross and follow me. May we become bolder and go deeper in following Jesus on the way of the Cross this Lent.

AMEN

⁶ Hebrews 12:2

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