

Sept. 12, 2021
Christ the Servant, Reston
Pentecost 16
Mark 8:27-38

Let's dive right into this gospel we just heard where Peter got his ears pinned straight back against his head. Peter needed what we call an "attitude adjustment" – and got it! It was breathtaking. First of all, Peter had tried to rebuke Jesus and he should have known better. Rebuking never worked for the disciples. It hadn't worked when the disciples had tried to rebuke people for bringing little children to Jesus. It hadn't worked when they tried to rebuke a blind man for approaching Jesus. And it didn't work here.

Jesus had just told the secret. He told what would happen to him. He would be rejected. He would suffer at the hands of the elders, chief priests and scribe. He would be killed. And he would rise.

It's understandable why Peter was upset with Jesus. This wasn't the Messiah he had been looking for. Peter wanted the conquering warrior. Peter wanted success. Peter wanted a winner. Peter did not want trial, torture, and death. So he rebuked Jesus. Wrong move.

Jesus turned things around and rebuked *him*. The words couldn't have been any more scorching. "Get behind me Satan." Don't you wonder if Peter even *heard* the next sentence? We hope he did. It was the reason for the rebuke. Jesus said to Peter, "...you are setting your mind not on divine things, but on human things."

Hey, it is easy to relate to Peter. He was only trying to do what he thought was good. But, you know, it has been said that the greatest threat to Christianity is not the evil, but the good. The elders, chief priests, and scribes were all good moral people, and good moral people have no need for Jesus.

So, Jesus began to describe a life style to Peter which didn't sound 'good.' He said to him 'bad' things like, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." He said to him things like, "...those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who want to lose their life for my sake... will save it." This doesn't sound 'good.'

That great theologian Mark Twain once said, "Many people are bothered by those passages in scripture which they cannot understand; but as for me," Twain said, "I always notice that the passages in scripture which trouble me most are those which I *do* understand."

There is no hidden meaning behind the words, "Take up your cross" or "Lose your life." These pretty much can be taken at face value. Jesus took up his cross and carried it to the place where he lost his life. So, when he asks us to "take up our crosses" he is talking about something more than sitting in traffic, or getting a glitch in your phone bill, or having your mother-in-law come to stay twice a year.

Taking up your cross is not putting up with petty annoyances. It is wholly and thoroughly putting another person ahead of yourself and giving up what you have for the sake of that person.

This is what we call the theology of the cross. It is to be contrasted with the theology of glory. The theology of glory is one which preachers like Joel Osteen push. It is this idea that the more faith we have or the more work we put into our lives we will see financial blessing, health,

protection and progress. We're moving up and onward, and the design of God is this very purpose; the more we put in by faith and obedience, the more we give to God, then the more God will bless us. The reason it is called a theology of glory is because it is for our own glory.

In contrast, a theology of the cross is the exact opposite of everything that has to do with the theology of glory. When we are called into faith with Christ we are called to die with him. As we enter into this relationship with God, there is no guarantee of our health being protected or our wealth being protected. Jesus doesn't tell us to be faithful to him so that he will be faithful to us. He is saying, "Take up your cross."

Joel Osteen says, "Give generously so that you will receive generously. But Jesus says, "Give generously with no hope at all of receiving anything in return." That's what Peter was having a hard time with.

But there is a way of saying it which holds hope and is true to the gospel: "Give generously because you have *already received* generously. You have received God's love and grace when you didn't deserve it. You have received forgiveness. You have received eternal membership in God's kingdom.

And there is a certain satisfaction to be gained when we give. For instance, when you take cold hard cash that you have earned by hard work and give it away for the well-being of another you can find a satisfaction for having done the right thing. Have you noticed that it is when you love another person that you, yourself, feel love? Have you very truly sacrificed – gone without – so that someone else could have? Maybe you have done this with a child. Maybe you have done this with a parent who needs expensive skilled care. Have you ever noticed that there is a certain something you *get* in the giving? This happens when we take up crosses,

when we lose our lives. But I almost hate to mention these things, because that is not what Jesus is talking about. Jesus is saying, “Give up yourself for others. Period. Make sacrifices. Period. Take up your cross. Period. Lose your life. Period.”

God invites you to take up your cross and carry it to your death in the assurance that you *have received* life eternal. He invites you to lose your life because he *has found* you.

Peter needed an attitude adjustment. We do, too.