

The message for February 28 2021

Today's reading comes from the gospel of Mark 8:34-38 and it goes like this; ³⁴ *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. ³⁵ 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,^[a] will save it. ³⁶ For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷ Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸ Those who are ashamed of me and of my words^[b] 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."*

Jesus told the crowds and his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 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." You have to wonder, what was Jesus trying to tell both the crowds of his time and to us?

Over the ages, many people have been interpreting these words in a variety of ways. I know, I have read many commentaries and have heard many sermons pertaining to these words, some more harsh than others. Personally, I believe the words Jesus used were meant for the people of his day and the reference to the cross was about him. If Jesus were here today, I am thinking that maybe he might use different words. Perhaps just one word, "consequences". Expanding on the word consequences, he might have said "you reap what you sow." Maybe, he could have quoted the Hindus and Buddhists and said the word "karma". However, the one phrase that I like best and have used myself is, "what goes around comes around." At the end of the day, it comes down to Jesus making us aware that the choices we make and the actions we take will bring all of us various consequences. Consequences that can lead us on a path closer to God and to hope. It can also put us on a path that keeps us feeling that there is something missing in our lives and little hope. Many will say that consequences go beyond our own personal choices. There is also the impact of the world around us, like the pandemic that we have been facing for the past year. This, of course, is something that is beyond our control.

Eventhough, there are many factors to the outcome of our choices, I believe that Jesus was simply trying to get the people of his time and for that matter ourselves, to focus on how our actions can lead us in one of two directions. The first direction is the following of Christ, which is a path to goodness, love, grace, joy, happiness, doing what is right and most importantly by giving hope. The second path is one that leads us away from God. It is a path that is more self serving and a path that keeps us thirsting and seeking. It is a path that keeps us out of reach of total joy and happiness. It is a path that will not let us win.

Now, the path Jesus calls us to follow, is not always going to be an easy path. Sometimes it will be a path that can and will challenge all of our emotions. Especially, during times like we are living in now, during the pandemic. Remember, there will always be challenges that are outside our control. Even as challenging as this path may be, it is a path worth following.

A simple example of this, is looking at my own call to ministry or my call to take up my cross. I felt called back when I was 19 years old. I chose not to follow. I chose a path that was easier and a path that I felt I was in control of. Throughout my working career in the financial world, I kept ignoring my call to follow. Yes, I had success throughout this time on my own separate journey away from God. However, I still felt a longing that I was missing something. I kept changing roles because I was never fully satisfied with what I was doing. It was not until I finally answered the call that I felt I was truly content. Don't get me wrong I still have the temptations in me to want to follow different paths, but I am much more content now. I am also still learning to trust and have faith that the Spirit is pushing me to keep following Christ path and the cross.

Today, I think Jesus' words of taking up our crosses is a new call to us. A call that will challenge us and require us to reach deep into our faith. For some of us, it will be a call to move forward as faith communities in new and different ways of worshipping and outreach. For others of us it will be a call to examine and fulfill our call to our personal ministry, whatever that may look like. These paths will at times feel scary and unsettling. I know, I have personally experienced this fear. I also know that by surrendering my life for God, I have felt new life in Christ.

In life there will always be outcomes based on the decisions we make. I have learned that when I chose to take up my cross and follow Jesus, my life was

opened to more beauty and joy than I could have ever imagined. When the churches that I was called to be a part of took up their cross and trusted that the Lord was with them, new possibilities came their way. The same can be true for you and your faith communities. Today, as you read this message, look to your faith and listen to what Jesus is calling you to do. Trust that the Lord will be with you when you take up your personal cross.

Blessings Pastor Paul