**March 21, 2021 Mark 8:31-9:1**

***The Way of the Cross***

**Scripture:** Mark 8:31-9:1 NRSV

*(31)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. (32)He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. (33)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." (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, 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 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." (9:1)And he said to them, "Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power."*

**Notes:**

1. This is an ***uncomfortable*** text
   1. Why does ***Jesus*** say this?.
2. Satan is an ***adversary***.
   1. The word “Satan” here means “***adversary***.”
   2. Peter is an ***adversary*** because he begins to rebuke Jesus.
3. Jesus rebukes Peter by talking about how ***anyone*** who is going to be a disciple needs to take up their cross too.
   1. Rev. Stephanie Lobdell says, “[These] are not your ***cross*** . . . these are thorns.”
4. When Jesus picked up his cross he experienced extreme ***suffering*** and walked the path to a literal ***death***.
   1. The way of God is ***humbling*** in the most extreme sense.
   2. The cost of ***discipleship*** is to follow Jesus.
   3. We must be willing to lay down our lives out of ***love***.
5. Why did Peter ***rebuke*** Jesus?
   1. Peter knew that to be Jesus’s disciple meant following him wherever he went, which would mean ***death*** for Peter too.
   2. Most of us will do whatever it takes to avoid ***death***
6. Many of us would like to say that we would have been ***supportive*** of Jesus
   1. What does ***carrying*** your cross look like in our world?
   2. Your cross requires complete ***submission***.
   3. Your cross requires you to be ***faithful*** even to death,
7. Can you say I AM ***SECOND*** today?
   1. We are called to the difficult ***way*** of the ***cross*** alongside Jesus.
   2. The way to ***resurrection*** is through the cross and cannot be experienced without ***death***.

**Script:**

Have you ever had something happen that is counter to everything that you believe? Perhaps you are working with a close friend towards a goal, and then out of nowhere your friend starts to say things that go against your goal. Perhaps they say things that are in direct contrast to the tasks to which you are called. I remember such a situation in my life once. In response to the change in attitude, a confrontation takes place. Words are said, some that needed to be said, and others that would have been better left unsaid. Needless to say, the relationship in my situation did not stand the test of time. We parted ways and have rarely spoke since.

Have you ever said something to provoke such a confrontation with a friend or coworker? Were you in the wrong? What could you have done or said to create a better reaction? Or perhaps you were on the other side of the confrontation; were you defending the goal to which you committed? Perhaps you did not respond and allowed your efforts to be in vain. Perhaps you did respond in a manner that was harsh in order to maintain the calling you were pursuing.

In some ways, that’s what we find in our Gospel Passage this morning. Jesus has Fed the 4000; then Jesus teaches about the Bread of Life from which we heard last week; as they travel on, heading ever closer to Jerusalem, He takes time to heal a blind man by smearing mud in his eyes. Further on, He asks his disciples who the people say that He is. Then he asks the disciples who they say that he is. And the disciples, Mostly Peter, respond that He is the Christ. And now we arrive at our passage for today, turn in your bibles to Mark 8:31- 9:1. Stand with me and join me as we share in the reading today.

(31)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. (32)He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. (33)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." (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, 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 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." (9:1)And he said to them, "Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power." ***Mark 8:31-9:1 NRSV***

This is an uncomfortable text; if for no other reason than the fact that Jesus calls Peter Satan! Peter is one of Jesus’s disciples, and not only that, he’s one of the inner circle. Peter seems so fervent in his faith, so honest, and so childlike in a way that it feels uncomfortable when Jesus calls him Satan. Judas might be an understandable person to talk to in this way. But Peter? Sweet, talkative, take-charge, walk-on-water Peter? Doesn’t seem to fit the bill.

Part of the reason it feels so uncomfortable is that, if Peter gets called Satan by Jesus, then maybe we too could fall into that category, which leaves us with the looming question: *Why does Jesus say this?*

**Satan is an adversary.** It’s important for us to know that “Satan” does not mean a cartoon devil with red horns and a pitch fork. What Jesus is saying is important, not a caricature. The word “Satan” here means “adversary.” Some versions actually translate the word here as adversary, which is more accurate. The word can sometimes be translated as “tempter” as well. Most often it is translated in the sense of a prosecutor in a court of law. Jesus is explaining to the disciples plainly that he is going to die. For once, he is not using parables. He is telling them directly what is going to happen to him. Peter is an adversary to this news because he begins to rebuke Jesus. He is tempting Jesus to not follow the path of the cross and to go a different way. He is arguing, like a prosecutor in a courtroom, that Jesus doesn’t need to die.

This word used here means that most likely Peter’s argument is a convincing one. While we don’t know exactly what Peter said, the use of the term “adversary” implies that it was a well thought-out and well-executed logical argument.

**Jesus rebukes the argument of Peter by not only reiterating that he is going to die but also by talking about how anyone who is going to be a disciple needs to take up their cross too.** When we think of crosses, we often think of empty, decorative crosses. This can sometimes anesthetize or sanitize the image of a cross for us. Today we might need to envision modern forms of execution an electric chair, or a gurney used on death row for lethal injections, or the images of lynchings from the not-so-distant past.

We sometimes think of picking up our cross as bearing minor inconveniences or enduring circumstances that are frustrating or painful to us. We often use the phrase “it’s my cross to bear.” We might consider the crosses we have to bear as things like a frustrating job situation, a chronic illness, a flooded basement, etc. But in the book *Sacred Invitation*, Rev. Stephanie Lobdell says, “[These] are not your cross . . . these are thorns.” “Thorns” is a reference to 2 Corinthians 12, where Paul talks about the thorn in his flesh. Sometimes these difficult situations. Situations that we wrongly label our “crosses” are relieved, or used as tools for sanctification. We may still suffer, but it’s different than a cross.

When Jesus picked up his cross he experienced extreme suffering and walked the path to a literal death. Crucifixion was a public shaming in the most extreme sense (think about the shame of the punishment of being put in the stocks in medieval times).The crucifixion meant that everyone; the government, the religious rulers, and even his friends thought Jesus had failed.

Jesus was aligning himself with the kingdom of God and the way and will of God, which were very different from the ways of the world. The way of God was humbling in the most extreme sense. The way of God was self-sacrifice. The way of God embraced the Beatitudes. Rev. Lobdell also says, “The cross is the eternal ‘no’ of God to revenge, violence, power games, and cycles of retribution.” The way of the cross takes Jesus to literal death. The cross he bore was not a decoration but an implement of death. Jesus carried the instrument of his own cruel, suffering death.

The cost of discipleship is to follow the same path that Jesus followed, including carrying a cross. The cross that Jesus calls his disciples to carry is not a decoration. We too are to humble ourselves to the point of public shame for what is good, holy, and loving. We too are to align ourselves with the self-sacrificial way of the kingdom of God. We should willingly lay down our privileges, our blessings, our jobs—our everything—to follow after Jesus. Jesus calls us to lay down our very lives out of love for God and others. This call was not metaphorical for the disciples, most of whom did in fact die for following Jesus. This call is not metaphorical for much of the world whose lives are in peril just for following Jesus. This call is not meant to be metaphorical for us either. We must be willing to lay down our lives out of love.

Our baptism is an illustration of this cost of discipleship. We die with Christ, that we might know the power of the resurrection. We don’t run from death because we know that our hope is ultimately in the resurrection. We can face, with hope, the darkest and worst parts of the world and illuminate them with love because death is not the end.

**Why did Peter rebuke Jesus?** There is a good chance that Peter was tempting Jesus to take the easier way. There was comfort in the familiar way things had always been. Perhaps he trusted that Jesus had the power to do something different. There is also a chance that Peter knew that to be Jesus’s disciple meant following him wherever he went, which would mean death for Peter too. He had already given up a lot to follow Jesus. Maybe he was afraid of what else he would be expected to do if Jesus went willingly to his death.

Peter’s response was human. We prefer comfort, ease, and privilege to giving up those things for the sake of others. Most of us will do whatever it takes to avoid death, which is why the health, wealth, and prosperity gospels are so appealing. If we sacrifice *just a little*, we will get a lot in exactly the way we want. That’s desirable. And isn’t it even fair? We love the idea of a Jesus who will swoop in and make our lives easy and comfortable. Maybe Peter is relatable because we too would be telling Jesus to do things a different, take the easier way than the path he was called to.

How do you relate to this story today? Many of us would like to say that we would have been supportive of Jesus. But deep down in we know we would have pleaded with him not to follow the road that would lead to his suffering; not to follow the road that would lead to his death. But Jesus knew what he was doing, and here today he was preparing his disciples to face what lies before them.

What does carrying your cross look like in our world for you, to fulfill your calling to follow Christ, what cross must you take up? Your cross requires complete submission to the will and ways of Christ. Your cross requires you to be fully committed to the calling placed upon your life, Not just when you have time; Not just when you feel like it; Not just when it is easy; There is nothing easy about carrying your cross. Your cross requires you to be faithful even to death, As I mentioned last week, we must die to self, before we can truly live for Christ. Our desires and wishes become the second priority and Jesus is first.

Today I wonder how many of you can say this simple phrase and truly mean it. I Am Second, it’s easy to say when we do not think of the ramifications of this commitment; but when you realize what you are saying, it takes on a whole different mindset. Can you say I AM SECOND today?

We are called to the difficult way of the cross alongside Jesus. No matter the cost, we are called to follow after him. There are many people in history who we have seen do this: Mother Teresa, who willfully placed herself in harm’s way to care for people with leprosy; Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who even wrote a book called *The Cost of Discipleship* while defying the Nazi regime (and going to prison for it). There are numerous others we probably know of, even in our own lives. These lives are a reminder to us that the way to follow Jesus is the way of the cross. It is hard, but it is good.

There is an old hymn called “The Way of the Cross Leads Home,” by Jessie B. Pounds. In this hymn there is a line that says “I must needs go home by the way of the cross, there’s no other way but this; I shall ne’er get sight of the Gates of Light, if the way of the cross I miss. The way of the cross leads home, the way of the cross leads home. It is sweet to know, as I onward go, the way of the cross leads home.”

This is the journey of Lent for Jesus and for us. The way to resurrection is through the cross. There is no other way. Resurrection cannot be experienced without death. So we travel in the way of Jesus on the blood-sprinkled road he walked out of love, grace, and obedience. We follow the same way. We know where the path leads, and still we follow Mark 8:31-9:1 NRSV