

Here We Still Stand – The Theology of the Cross – October 31, 2021

Good Shepherd, Beaver Dam

Mark 8:27-35 -- ²⁷ Jesus went away with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" ²⁸ They told him, "John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others say one of the prophets." ²⁹ "But who do you say I am?" he asked them. Peter answered him, "You are the Christ." ³⁰ Then he warned them not to tell anyone about him. ³¹ Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things; be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the experts in the law; be killed; and after three days rise again. ³² He was speaking plainly to them. Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But after turning around and looking at his disciples, Jesus rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! You do not have your mind set on the things of God, but the things of men." ³⁴ He called the crowd and his disciples together and said to them, "If anyone wants to follow me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.

Dear fellow believers still standing with Martin Luther on the unchanging truths of Scripture!

Mark begins this portion of his history of the life and ministry of Jesus, indicating that Jesus and his disciples were doing what they so often did—journeying from one village to the next. Jesus used these journeys to teach seminary classes to those disciples who would serve as his messengers after his visible presence was no longer present on the earth. We are invited this morning to learn from him and to **Journey with Jesus – from the Cross to Eternity.**

When someone leaves your house to go on some sort of journey, what do you do? You stand outside and wave goodbye. You are acknowledging that for the present that person won't be in your presence. I remember leaving my parents home on the farm on numerous occasions as I went to a faraway location to serve in the ministry. I knew that I might never see them again in this life. In fact my father died while Karla and I were living in Germany. I had said farewell for the final time.

The disciples had done this. Hadn't they. When Jesus called them to follow him they left their families and their business behind. They said farewell. This is what Jesus invites us to do when he says: *"If anyone wants to follow me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.*

Jesus' invites us to do what is extremely challenging. He directs us to say "no" to the desires which come not from him but from Satan, from the sinful world around us and even from our own sinful hearts. This is what he means when he tell us to deny ourselves. He wants us to wave off, yes to run from, the sinful temptations that assault us. Jesus tells us: *"Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:33).* St. Paul in writing to Titus amplifies Jesus' instructions: *"For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age." (Titus 2:11-12).*

So we have to ask ourselves: How well have we done saying farewell to things of this world, which draw us away from our Savior, from following his will, and from serving one another with patience and love? Not very well, I am sure is our honest conclusion to our adherence to Jesus invitation.

When we draw that honest conclusion and the reality of our sin and guilt stare us in face and terrorize our hearts, we can then listen to Jesus as he instructed his disciples as they journeyed to the next village. He told them: *Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things; be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the experts in the law; be killed; and after three days rise again. ³² He was speaking plainly to them.* Jesus' journey was the ultimate example of selflessness. He said farewell to the glories of

heaven, to being served by angels and came to a life of humility and ultimately to the horror of false arrest. He endured pain and suffering which he didn't deserve. He was abandoned by his heavenly Father for my sins and he never complained. Twice in these verses we see the word **"must"**. Jesus had to do this to say farewell to what was rightfully his so that we would be redeemed. His suffering was not necessary for his sake but because of his love for us. Jesus not only said farewell to what was rightfully his he also picked up some luggage during his earthly journey.

Just as a traveler packs some suitcases and the car if journeying by automobile, so also Jesus carried the cross—a physical burden with which he needed help as he was led from Pilate's Judgment Hall to Golgotha. Worse than the physical weight of the cross was the spiritual burden that weighed him down—the guilt of the sins of all people. We rejoice that Jesus carried his cross for there our guilt is wiped away. There we find the peace and joy of forgiveness and the promise of an eternity of peace and joy in heaven.

Our journey with Jesus not only involves "farewells" we might say it also includes luggage. Well, it's not exactly luggage. Again listen to Jesus' words, *"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."* In order to journey with Jesus each of us must take up our own cross. But of course we need to know what that means. Jesus carried a cross made out of wood. Should we expect something similar? Or what does a disciple's cross look like? Yes, some of Jesus' followers were actually crucified. In fact, it is believed that the disciple Peter's life was taken that way. But as we let the Bible interpret itself we learn that Jesus had something else in mind when he spoke about his disciples taking up their crosses to follow him. In the most narrow sense the Bible defines a Christian's cross as any suffering that they face because they follow Jesus. So, when a follower of Jesus is persecuted, tortured, imprisoned, or put to death because of their faith they are taking up their cross. Sadly, that is happening to Christians around the world. The cross we carry for Jesus might not be that extreme. It might just be the eye roll of a neighbor or coworker when you say something about being a Christian. A Christian student might be mocked for his or her faith with it seems to be in conflict with popular opinions and human ideas. Or perhaps a follower of Jesus who doesn't join in the office gossip and is ridiculed for it. That too is a cross to bear while journeying with Jesus.

To avoid any misunderstanding every believer must hear what Jesus said about carrying his or her own cross. There are some Christian churches that are promoting a "theology of glory" as it has been called. They teach that if a person is obedient to God he will bless that person with career advancement, financial success, and good health. They say that a follower of Christ should be on top of the world. If a believer suffers they say it is because he or she is not right with God. You can understand the disastrous consequences of this kind of thinking. The way of the Christian is the way of the cross. It was that way when Jesus spoke these words to Peter. It is still that way today as you and I journey with Jesus. Jesus doesn't promise us a bed of roses in life he says that we may expect a bed of nails instead. The Christian life is not easy street. It's often a narrow road filled with potholes, obstructions, and dangers.

Taking up our cross each day as we journey with Jesus has another side to it as well. It's closely related to what Jesus said about, "denying ourselves." Our sinful pride, our personal desires for self, our wishes apart from God, must be nailed to the cross. This is something that the Apostle Paul declared so strongly in his letter to the Galatians. *"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."* (Galatians 2:20) *"Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires."* (Galatians 5:24) *"May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."* (Galatians 6:14) Taking up our cross and crucifying our sinful nature is another part of our journey with Jesus. Today, let it be our prayer that he strengthens our resolve to take up our crosses as we follow him.

Martin Luther is the one who came up with the terms **“the theology of glory”** and **“the theology of the cross”**. His entire training as a child and a university student taught him this idea that his obedience to God would bring him to peace with God. But he never found that peace despite what he tried. Becoming a monk didn't help. Abusing his body by whipping himself and sleeping on the stone floor of his room in the monastery didn't. A trip to Rome and viewing a plethora of relics didn't help. Becoming a priest didn't help. Only when through his study of the Epistle to the Romans did he understand that it was only through the cross Christ that he came to a right relationship with God. Once he understood that he was driven by that Biblical truth to undertake all that he did for the rest of his life. He wanted the people of Wittenberg and not only Wittenberg but all people to have the peace and the joy that came to him through the theology of the cross.

The amazing thing is that through the theology of the cross we will receive glory – that is eternal glory in the perfection of heaven. As you journey through life remember to say farewell to the things of this world and to pick up your luggage. Our journey with Jesus leads to the cross (first his and then ours). Our journey with Jesus finally leads us to the unending peace and joy of heaven. Keep your eyes focused on Jesus' cross. This will enable you to carry your cross. You can do this with a focus beyond this life--into eternity. Amen.

Pastor Jaeger
October 31, 2021