



## Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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March 8, 2009  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Lent  
Mark 8:31-38  
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Genesis 28:10-17  
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 73  
Second Lesson: Romans 5:1-11  
Gospel: Mark 8:31-38

### **Plain Talk from Jesus**

Jesus reveals his struggle  
Jesus reveals our struggle

As I have visited people in the hospital over the years, quite often I've been in the room when the doctors come to talk to them about the surgery they had or what's upcoming. I sat off to the side as the doctor talked to them about some of these things. Quite often as I listened to the many syllable words bounce off the walls, I wondered what they were talking about. And quite often the person that the doctor was explaining this to would, after the doctor was done talking, just look up at him and say "In English please" because they just didn't understand everything that was being said. Maybe you've had that experience.

Then I've been there at times when the English explanation brought words they didn't want to hear. In reality, it sounded better to them when they didn't understand what the doctor was telling them because some of the news that came wasn't what they wanted to hear.

This is along the same lines as what happened in what we read from our gospel today. Jesus had spent a lot of time teaching his disciples in parables saying, "Him who has ears, let them hear." Quite often they thought they knew what he was talking about. They weren't really sure, but now all of a sudden Jesus sits down and he starts talking plainly to them. "Hey, pretty soon I'm going to go to Jerusalem. Chief priest, teachers of the Law, they are going to kill me. This isn't a parable. They are going to kill me. And after three days, I'm going to rise again. Not figuratively. I'm going to die and then I'm going to become alive." He's telling them this plainly, getting them ready for what is about to happen.

But notice that Peter didn't like what he heard. Notice how Peter took Jesus aside and said, "Wait a minute Son of God, Creator of the world. I know better. You shouldn't do this." Just before this in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus had asked them "who do people say that I am?" Peter had said "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." He had made this beautiful confession that Jesus is true God, that he is the Savior of the world, and now Peter moves on to correcting true God, the Savior of the world. "There's got to be a better way to save us than you dying and then rising again." That's not going to usher in the messianic kingdom that they were still confused about.

They still didn't completely understand everything. That's why as Jesus nears the end of his ministry he starts talking very plainly to them in words they can understand, but unfortunately they weren't the words that Peter at least wanted to hear. So Peter has to take the stinging rebuke of Jesus, not just looking him in the face, but turning to the disciples and saying "Get behind me Satan" about Peter, right? That's pretty stinging words. But that's what Jesus had to do.

When he talked plainly about his own struggles and about his own suffering, Peter didn't want it. But this was God's plan from eternity. From eternity his plan was that what he would demand of you and me, "Be holy because I the Lord your God am holy," he would give to us. He would give it to us through Jesus' perfect life. Then all those sins that we are born with, all those sins that we commit after we are born, he would take them to the cross and he would be punished for them in our place. This is God's plan. Peter doesn't like it. He wants an earthly kingdom. He wants something else. He doesn't want Jesus to die and then have to rise again. He wants something else. We'll look at it in a little bit how we are so much like Peter and we want something else other than what God has told us "this is what I expect of you."

But we have to understand why Jesus had to suffer and die. He had to do it so that you and I wouldn't. Sure, we'll still die, but we won't die spiritually. We won't spend eternity in hell because God has sent his Spirit into our hearts to lead us to believe that what Jesus did for the whole world he did for us personally. So now when we stand before God, we are holy and blameless, clothed in Jesus' righteousness as we were clothed at our baptism with the righteous acts of Christ. So when God looks at us, he doesn't see our sins. He sees the perfection that is Jesus. When God looks at us, our sins have been punished already in Christ, so while we are in Christ, we will not suffer the punishment for our sins.

That's God's plan - straightforward, very simple, very plain direct talk. Sometimes we want to give ourselves a little more credit. We want to say that God loves us because we serve him or we do this or we do that. That was pretty straightforward in the Second Lesson, wasn't it? While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. He died for the ungodly, not for the Godly, not for the good intended, not for those who try hard, not for those who do good. He died for those that are filthy rotten sinners. That would be you. That would be me. That would be everyone in the world.

So he loves us in spite of who we are. This is important for us to remember because of what he tells us not only about his suffering, but about our suffering. Then Jesus brought the crowd together with the disciples and said to everyone, "If you want to follow me, if you want to be my disciple, here are three things that you need to do. Deny yourself. Take up your cross. Follow me." That's what he says. "If you want to be my disciple, here's what you need to do."

Deny yourself – that means you and I need to quit doing what Peter was doing, trying to tell God how to act, telling God what he should be doing, telling God what is the best for everything. Deny ourselves – quit thinking that we know all the answers and humbly

submit to the will of a God who is far, far above us and know that if this is his plan and this is what he is doing, it's not up to me to say "God you're screwing up. Fix it." If he allows some difficulty into our life that comes as a result of sin in general, some sickness, some heartache, some disease, you and I don't have to like it. You and I don't have to get excited because it comes. But you and I can know that if God allows it into our life, he will be there to help us through it. So deny ourselves. Don't think we know better and say "God, you shouldn't have let this happen." Pick up that cross and follow him.

Pick up your cross – this isn't talking about hardships that come just because we live in a sinful world. This isn't the hardships that come because you and I are sinners and at times do stupid things that get us into trouble. What he is talking about here specifically when he says "pick up your cross" are the things that you and I would endure because we are Christians, because we are living for God.

In our First Lesson, we saw Jacob fleeing from Beersheba, right? Do you remember why he was fleeing? His dear twin brother wanted to kill him, right? Why did he want to kill him? Because God gave to him the blessing that the Messiah would come through him. He had the right of the firstborn. Big brother by moments didn't like it. So he wanted to kill his brother.

We may not have people want to kill us because we are serving God, but there are times when you and I are probably more afraid of the things that will come about if we serve God faithfully. When we serve God faithfully and live our faith, there will be times when people will attack us, verbally probably more often than physically. Although my dad once got chased out of a barn with a pitch fork when he was making an Elder call, so physical attacks I suppose are possible.

But verbally; I've been attacked verbally a lot in my life as a pastor. I've had people tell me words I can't repeat from the pulpit because I was saying "God says what you are doing is wrong" or saying "no, you can't do that because God says we shouldn't do those things." I've been told I'm a backward, superstitious fool and that it's the 20<sup>th</sup> century, now the 21<sup>st</sup> century, "get over it. Why are you so backward?" I guess I'm so backward at times because that's what God says. If being forward means being against God, I guess I'd rather be backward.

But when we do what is right before God, we will at times put ourselves on the line. If you know someone that's caught in a sin, have you admonished them? Have you told them "What you are doing is wrong. You need to turn away from it." Or are we afraid of how they'll receive it. Jesus would say, "If you want to follow me, take up your cross and do what I say you should be doing as a Christian. If that means at times that someone is going to think of you less or not think of you as their friend anymore, take up your cross and follow me. Deny yourself."

And if you and I are honest with ourselves, we don't always deny ourselves, do we? We don't always do what God has called us to do because sometimes we are worried

about how others will perceive us, how others will view us. We don't want to lose a friend. We'd rather have that friend, I guess, go to hell than to turn away from their sin and find forgiveness in Christ because we don't want to lose their earthly friendship. That's what Jesus is talking about as a cross, the things that we suffer for the sake of serving God. Sometimes they are little things. Sometimes they are bigger things.

But he says, "Deny yourself, take up your cross, and then follow me." It's a word that means follow and keep on following me. Get closer and closer to me. Know me better and better and better. We do that through the Word and through the Sacraments. We do that through this ongoing relationship of having God himself, the Creator of the world, talk to us, whisper in our ear through his Word, tell us he loves us as we receive the wine and the wafer, his very body and blood that took away our sins, that took away all those times that you and I don't take up our cross, because when we come to the Lord's Supper, that's what he's doing. He's forgiven us for the times that we have said "no, God. I know better." The times that you and I are like Peter, the times God would have to say to us "Get behind me Satan." He doesn't say that to us. He says, "Through the life and death of Christ, you are forgiven. Through this body and blood, you are forgiven. Now grow and go and live for me."

That's what our God has called us to do. He has not called us to an easy life. He has not called us to a life that's full of giggles. Well, maybe sometimes he does bring some into our lives. But he has called us to take up our cross and follow him and trust that the one who loved us enough to die for us will help us through every pothole we run into in life. He will help us through every time that our feelings are hurt because people say something to us because we are living our faith. Trust that he will be there. He will cushion the blow. He will strengthen us with his love and he will enable us to go forward and pick up our cross, deny ourselves, and follow him.

The points he makes are so obvious, right? What good is it if you gain the whole world yet go to hell? You gain nothing. This world is but a pin prick on the timeline of eternity. So lift your eyes a little bit farther heavenward and live for the one who is not ashamed of you.