



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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June 23, 2013

Pentecost 5

Sermon Text: [Genesis 39:6b-12, 16-23](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Genesis 39:6b-12, 16-23](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 22](#)

Second Lesson: [Hebrews 11:24-26](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Luke 9:18-24](#)

The Believer Follows Christ Followers of Christ Expect Persecution

Even when they do what is right

Trust that God has a plan

In Christ, our risen and ruling Savior, dear fellow redeemed:

In our Gospel today, Jesus talked about taking up our cross and following him. That phrase at times I think is a bit misused by us, even by us Christians who I trust the Lord would want to know better. We at times talk about difficulties in life that we face or endure as being our cross. Some are. Some aren't.

An example might be that some people might tell me that the cross I bear in this world is that I'm a Lions' fan and waiting for them to win would just be forever and it will never come. That's not really the kind of cross that God is talking about here. Even some of the things we endure that are heartache and hardship, like sicknesses and diseases that come into this world because of the fall into sin or the loss of loved ones...they are hard and difficult and God promises to help us through them, but they are not what he is talking about when he says "Take up your cross and follow me."

Then the question naturally that should be arising in your mind would be, what is Jesus talking about? That's often how we talk about the crosses that we bear in life. We talk about the difficulties.

He's talking more about what happened to Joseph than just the difficulties. When Jesus says, "Take up your cross and follow me," he's talking about the difficulties that come into your life simply because you are doing what is right before God. You are living your faith, and at times you will be persecuted for it. You will even suffer for it. That's the cross that Jesus tells us to take up.

So when he talks about "Whoever is going to lose their life for me will save it, whoever wants to save their life will lose it," he's telling us how we address and how we handle these crosses, the things that we bear because we are Christians, the suffering and persecution we endure because we are Christians. We can either flee to God or flee away from him. That's why he tells us about it ahead of time, because he wants us to understand that as we live for God in a sinful world, at times, like Joseph, we will be persecuted.

I think you're probably pretty familiar with the story of Joseph. God had given him those dreams and told him he was going to be a special guy. It didn't sit well with his brothers. Pretty soon Joseph is listening to an argument between his brothers, not over who is going to take out the garbage, but "Should we kill Joseph or just sell him into slavery?" That's what he had to listen to from inside that pit. So they sold him into slavery, the loving, kind siblings that they were.

He gets down there and as far as that goes, the Lord took pretty good care of him. He put him in charge of Potiphar's household as a slave. He is in charge of everything. He is overseeing everything. But Potiphar's wife has other plans for him. She wasn't talking about kindergarten nap time when she says, "Come to bed with me." She wanted him to have sex with her.

Humanly speaking, many slaves would say, "Hey, this is going to be great because this is going to give me favored slave status over the rest of the household. Now I'll not only be in charge of the whole household, but I'll also be sleeping with the boss' wife. Things will be really good. I'll be getting cushy things from both of them." Humanly speaking, there are a lot of reasons why Joseph could say this might be a good idea, right?

But notice what his answer was. "My master has put me in charge of everything, so I shouldn't do it to offend him. But more importantly, how could I do such an evil thing?" He says, "It's a matter of right and wrong, and this is wrong. This is sinful. This is evil. If I do it, I'm sinning against God." So it wasn't about what it could do for him. It was about what was right before the God that he loved, the God in whom he trusted, the God whom he desired to serve.

Potiphar's wife didn't just go over and say, "Oh, gee, you're right. I'm wrong" and pat him on the back and say, "Thanks for sharing that insight with me." Instead she keeps the cloak and concocts a story. She tells it to Potiphar. Joseph gets thrown into prison. Joseph does what is right and God allows this to happen to him. That doesn't seem right, does it? But that's what God did.

Joseph did what was right, and it cost him. It cost him a number of years in prison. This wasn't a nice country club federal prison. This was Pharaoh's prison. I have to think the quality of food probably went downhill. It just doesn't seem right.

I don't know if you've ever experienced it, but when you do what is right before God and people are upset with you, it really stings. I've been a pastor for about 24 years now. There are various times when I've had to say, "No, we can't do that because that's wrong before God." I don't know how many different weddings I've done where I remember having that discussion. "We really want cousin Gertrude to sing. Yes, she's Muslim, but she should be able to sing. She sings really well and we just love Ave Maria." You have to say, "No, that's not right before God. God has said those that lead worship should be of one faith. God says all worship should be directed toward him, not toward the marriage couple. They are not the wind beneath my wings. And

worship should not be directed towards the Savior's mother." When I've had to say those things, not once has anyone come to me and said, "Gee, thanks pastor. Thanks for teaching me that. Thanks for setting me straight." Instead, I've been called a lot of words that I can't say right now. I remember one time specifically when I was called some words that I had never heard of. I had to look them up on the internet. I didn't know what I was called. When I went home that night and put my head on the pillow, I got to stare at the ceiling for quite some time because it wasn't fun.

I don't know if you've had to endure that at work where you do what's right and there is pressure on you to do what's wrong and it causes you sleepless nights. Do I do what is right before God? If I do what is right before God, shouldn't God take care of me? Shouldn't he see to it that things go my way? Shouldn't he do something for me because I'm serving him? Do you ever live with that struggle? I want to do what is right but I also don't want to have to suffer for it. That's where we often live. We know what's right. We know that when we do what is right, at times we are going to suffer for it.

So how can we do it? What do we need to do? How can we do what Joseph did? How can we do what is right before God? There is really only one answer. When we look at ourselves and we look at how it might affect us, Satan is going to convince us to go along with the crowd and maybe that's not really what it says and everyone does it and 3,000 other excuses that have fled through your mind before will come into your head again, right? We will be tempted to do what is wrong just for convenience sake, just for our own peace and for our own well being just so that we don't have those sleepless nights. Then we are putting ourselves in danger. "To go against conscience is always sin" God says. He tells us it's dangerous.

Once we start caving in and listening to Satan's lies, we can just take God's grace for granted and say, "He'll forgive me anyhow, so I don't really need to live to serve him." If you say, "He is going to forgive me anyhow and I don't need to live to serve him," I'm not really treasuring the forgiveness he's given me. And if I'm not going to treasure the forgiveness he's given me, sooner and sooner it is going to become less and less important to me. That's dangerous. That's very dangerous.

As Christians, we are called to serve God. God tells us flat out over and over and over in Scripture that we are going to suffer persecution for it. We just sang a Psalm of the words of the Messiah and how people were gloating over his death. If that's how they were going to treat the one who made them, the one who loved them so much he came to live and die for them, can we really expect anything different? We really shouldn't because God has laid it out to us that there will be persecution. That's why this morning's Bible Study on end times is just so important. How the end times apply to our daily life reminds us we're not living in our eternal home. Our goal isn't just to have happy lives here. Our goal, our ultimate purpose of our existence is to be with our God forever in the glory of heaven. So to set aside our God for the sake of peace and quiet here and now is foolish. Yet it is a foolishness that you and I are prone to.

That's why we need his Word constantly strengthening us. That's why we need fellow Christians constantly strengthening us by pointing us to the Word, by pointing us to God's love, by pointing us to God's promises, and telling us that Christ has overcome the world. That means he's overcome the things that we are concerned about right then and right there. That's why we need his body and blood, for him to look us in the eye so to speak and say, "This is what I did for you because I love you this much. This is what will strengthen you and enable you to do what is right before me."

He never promises us it will be easy. He never promises us it will be fun. He never promises us any of that, but he promises us he will be with us to the very ends of the age. He tells us all authority has been given to him, so we are just to trust in him, find strength in him, and serve him.

Then we remember just how much he loves us and what he did for us, how he took away all of our sins, how he sent Jesus because he knew so well that we would choose the comfortable instead of the faithful. He took away those sins already. Now that's why in the future we want to do what is right before him. We want to be more faithful. We want to find joy in our Lord and joy in his Word.

But that still leaves us with that problem of "God, why? Why do you let this garbage into my life? Why don't you pat me on the head and say, 'Well done good and faithful servant? Why don't you treat me more like a little leaguer and give me a trophy just for participating? Why do you have to make me go through this?" I think we can learn from the life of Joseph too.

God had a plan for Joseph. The plan wasn't for Joseph's earthly peace or happiness. He was sold into slavery. He got some experience in running a household when he was at Potiphar's house. Potiphar's wife falsely accused him and he was thrown in prison. He got more experience running something bigger, running the prison as the Lord put him over that. Then the Lord gave him the ability to interpret dreams. He interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh's servants and said, "Remember me when you go back to Pharaoh." The guy forgot him for a few more years. I don't think as all those things are going on that Joseph was thinking, "Hey, this is great! God has a plan. I'm sure this is going to turn out wonderfully well for me." But God did have a plan.

Finally Pharaoh had all those dreams about skinny cows, fat cows, skinny cows, not ice cream, but skinny cows and fat cows, skinny cows eating fat cows, and all that stuff. No one could tell him what it was about or any of that. Finally Joseph does, and Joseph gets elevated to second in command over all of Egypt. So the lesson to take home from this is, you be faithful and God will make you second in command over a nation, right? No. It's not that.

It's this...God has a plan to use this persecution and this suffering to refine us, to lead us to focus more on him so that we can serve him even more faithfully in the future in whatever ways he puts in front of us. For Joseph, it was seeing to it that there was food so the nation of Israel could be preserved, the Messiah would come from that nation,

and you and I could be saved. His plan for you and me might be that he makes us more and more faithful so that somewhere down the road, in our faithfulness we serve someone with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and that person is led by the Holy Spirit to believe and rejoice. Our faithfulness and our ability to be faithful even in the face of persecution might be that God has a plan that he leads us to become more and more faithful, more and more reliant on him, and more and more courageous so that we speak the Gospel to fellow Christians that are straying from the truth and are in danger of losing their faith.

I don't know what God's plan is for me, so I have no clue what it is for you. But you and I both have to trust that if he allows difficulty into our lives, he has a plan. Our job is just to cling tighter to him and not whine and say, "God, why did you let this happen?" Although we are going to do it. Our job is to cling tighter to him, to get past the whining and to hold tight to Word and Sacrament and trust that God will work all things for our eternal good, not our earthly happiness, not our earthly success, not our earthly giddiness, but our eternal happiness.

So in the end, when I cling to Jesus Christ, I don't really care if you tell me the Lions haven't ever won a Super Bowl. I've already got heaven, and you aren't taking it away. Amen.