

"Deny the Self, Take Up the Cross, Follow Me"

September 13, 2009 – Proper 19 B

Mark 8:27-38

The Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church

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Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

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. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 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." 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. 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. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? 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."

Prayer.

I. At this altar table: Deny the Self

That's right. You heard me. Deny the Self.

March yourself straight down this aisle, eat the bread, and drink the cup.

Then, spill your guts to God.

Not to me, mind you.

Give it up to the Lord.

The Lord knows what burden you are carrying anyways.

So it doesn't make any sense to with hold back anything.

Nothing.

For once in your life it's time to swim upstream;

To go against the flow.

The whole world is telling you to promote yourself.

Puff up that resume.

Talk the big talk, and, embellish your accomplishments a little.

Better yet, embellish them a lot.

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That's what the world wants you No, expects you ... to do.
The world wants results out of you,
Rewards you for accomplishments
With the hope of sucking you even more dry and parched that what you've already become.
You think you're tired at the end of the day now?
Just keep it up.
Keep meeting the expectations of others.
Worse yet, exceed the expectations of others and make a habit out of it.
The demands of this world never cease to build.
That hamster wheel never stops spinning.
Never.
The demand of Christ, however, remains the same:
Deny the self.
Deny.
It means to give up something.
In this case
Give up yourself.
Yield to the higher power.
Give up yourself to Jesus Christ.
Jesus wouldn't take the excuse of the rich young ruler,
And he isn't going to take any excuses from any of us, either.
In my experience, Jesus hates whiners.
Yield to Christ,
And simply allow him to lead.
Let Christ drive your life.
Let Jesus be in control.
Life is so much easier.
Yes, you still work in the world,
But as Paul says, you don't become a part of it.
Yes, you continue to love, and live, and give,
But it is no longer for your own end.
When the self is denied,
And Jesus is working through your life,
The work of His kingdom takes on a whole new passion.
We do what we do because that is what Jesus wants us to do.
Life is easier.
And you'll sleep better at night, too.
Amen!

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II. At this altar table: Take Up Your Cross

And you thought the world would be handed to you on a silver spoon?
What made you so delusional?
The cross Jesus is talking about is something on which people die.
Their flesh is nailed,
They're tilted upright,
And dropped into a hole.
There, they suffer under the hot sun.
They bake.
Naked in front of everybody; for the whole world to see.
Until they become so exhausted and anemic and weak
They can't hold themselves up
And they drop
And suffocate.
Take up your cross?
I'd rather stand in line for the Screaming Eagle and ride it a few million times.
The job description for being one of Jesus' disciples
Includes a willingness to die for him.
I'm not talking about becoming a messianic nut job and stock piling AK-47s to fight off the ATF
and FBI.
Jesus is talking about making it your life's purpose
To work for him,
To do his will,
With every living breath,
Until the moment you die.
That is what Jesus did.
He worked for the Father,
Then according to his Father's will,
He was crucified on the cross.
He blazed the path and set the example.
It is now up to us
To make it this our whole life's effort.
Sacrifice and suffering is to be expected.
It doesn't mean we go and seek it out.
But neither does it mean that avoiding it is the best choice.
Suffering comes.
Sacrifices ... personal sacrifices ... may be required.
Taking up the cross of Jesus does involve a willingness to make sacrifices, and, if necessary, to
endure personal suffering on his behalf, and on behalf of his kingdom.
I am not speaking about the suffering of life's trials and temptations.
Yes, personal suffering ... disease, illness, injury, social isolation, jail, prejudice, injustice ... can
be so painful that it can cause some to bend and some to break.
Here, however, Jesus is speaking about suffering for him.

Persecution because of your beliefs;
Hard labor because of your faith;
Death even, simply because you are Christ-ian;
Because you are a Christ follower.
And you thought it ended with your baptism?
That it was all down-hill after the Holy Spirit spoke and led you to conversion?
Baby, the Lord was just getting started!
This bread,
This wine,
Is a reminder
Not only of the cross of Jesus
But also
Of the cross that we must be willing to bear for him.
Amen.

III. At this altar table: Renew Your Vow to Follow Jesus

Okay.

Let me get this straight:

The preacher is asking me to promote Jesus by denying myself,
He is telling me I might have to take a bullet for the Lord, to suffer and possibly die,
And now,

I'm being told to drop everything I'm doing
... drop pretty much everything

And to immediately change directions mid-course
And go and follow him?

Thanks, but, ... let me get back to you!

News flash:

That is exactly what I'm asking you to do.

Because that was what Jesus asked Peter to do.

That's the standard that has been set.

And yes, that's what we have to live up to.

Look at it this way:

You're born into this world with nothing (literally)

And you leave this world with nothing (granted, some of us will be buried in a cheap suit).

But that's it.

Out of the billions of people on the planet,

And even more billions of people who have live on earth over the history of time,

What makes you or me any more important than the gamma particle that just flew through your brain?

The only thing that adds value to life is what you chose to do with the gift of life you've been given.

What are you going to do with that next breath?

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Are you going to waste it in silence,
Or are you going to follow the Lord?
What are you going to do the rest of the day?
Do what you want to do,
Or do what the Lord wants you to do?
You don't need me to tell you the details;
Crack open that Bible.
Open your mind to prayer.
Get yourself into Sunday school, one of our missions, or one of our study groups.
Jesus cuts across all classes.
You work in a factory?
Your labor is for the Lord.
You work in an office?
Your labor is for the Lord.
You have the talent of a violinist?
You play for the Lord.
You know how to make the internet stand on it's head?
You do it for the Lord.
You work, you live, you laugh, you love,
In everything you do,
Until the moment you breath no more,
You do it for the Lord, Jesus Christ.
You do it to please him,
To follow him,
To do his will.
Snap.
This is a tall order, no doubt.
But this is what you can fell
Experiencing the Gospel lesson for this morning.
This is the passion that comes
By the eating of this bread
And drinking of this cup.
Do this,
Jesus said,
In remembrance of me.
Do this,
Because you and I,
we will always be his disciples.
Amen.

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