

A Sermon for the Second Sunday in Lent – Fishing with Crosses

February 28, 2021

The Rev. Robin Teasley

*Jesus began to teach his disciples 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.” Mark 8:31-38*

Do you remember the invitation Jesus gave to the disciples, back in chapter one of Mark’s gospel? In verse seventeen Jesus said, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” There was something about Jesus that compelled those first disciples to drop their nets, to leave their former ways behind and follow Jesus. What they heard was that following Jesus meant fishing for people.

Fast forward to today’s reading, where Jesus tells his disciples that when he gets to Jerusalem he will suffer, and be rejected, and be killed, and after three days rise again. Then he says, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” Well, this was more than fishing, a lot more. This was not what they signed up for, this was not going as expected, and Jesus was not conforming to the established definition of Messiah – a messiah who would not die, a messiah who would live and conquer the rulers oppressing God’s people to bring about a new kingdom.

We can understand the shock and disbelief. There is nothing comfortable about this passage, even for us today. Peter, once again, puts into words what the disciples, and indeed what the rest of us are all thinking. He began to rebuke Jesus – how could you say such a thing?! You are the Messiah; you cannot possibly suffer and die! Peter and the disciples were so upset that they could not hear anything past suffering, rejection and death. We so often respond in this way when we cannot accept what is happening, what we don’t want to hear, what is the real truth.

I love Peter because I find that more often than not, I am Peter. We are just like the disciples because we are human. And because the disciples were human, Jesus had to explain to them more than once, just what discipleship means. Not only was Jesus telling them that he would die on a cross, but that they too had crosses to take up. This was indeed about more than just fishing, it was fishing with crosses.

We see the cross as the symbol of Christianity. But if we imagine ourselves living in the time of Jesus, we could not miss the meaning behind Jesus’ words to take up the cross. The road to Jerusalem was lined with crosses. Every person living under Roman rule knew what a cross was used for – and it instilled fear. Fear of death. This tended to curb misbehavior or insurrection and kept the Roman government running smoothly.

Suddenly it was very clear to the disciples that death was on the horizon, and they were very afraid. What could Jesus mean by this? What did this mean for their mission, for their lives? Yet, even in their fear, there was something that compelled them to keep following Jesus. Even in their fear, they wanted to know how Jesus could knowingly walk toward his cross.

Perhaps Jesus wanted them to see the bigger picture, to see beyond their individual fears. Perhaps Jesus wanted the disciples to understand that there were worse things than death in this world. Perhaps Jesus wanted them to see that living in fear was no life at all.

This is something I think we can all identify with, this living in fear. And if we are not careful, fear can become our god, it can be that which blocks our relationships with others and with God, it can be that which keeps us from really living. It can keep us from following Jesus.

Jesus has been showing them all along what following looks like. It is fishing, and yet it is so much more. Jesus has been proclaiming the message, feeding and healing, reaching out and including everyone. If the disciples would only see his actions, see him doing what needed to be done *despite* the fear, then they too could take up their crosses and live life rather than fear death. Because there is so much more to *living life* than *fearing death*.

We all have fears that come in many shapes and sizes – crosses that line our own road to Jerusalem. We receive an unwanted medical diagnosis. We may fear that our financial situation will continue to worsen. Some of us fear standing up for what we know is right, because the consequences might mean loss of a family relationship or friendship, perhaps even a loss of employment. So many of us won't reveal who we truly are because we fear rejection.

But Jesus asks us to take up that cross, that thing we fear most. He asks us to stop stepping over it or ignoring it – and just pick it up. Jesus wants us to know that we do not have to carry it alone. He has died on that cross for us, and he is with us in the midst of our fear.

We are all on our way to a death, burial and resurrection in this life. It's a repeating pattern all through our lives. Every ending and new beginning in life is preparing us for our own death and resurrection. In our burial liturgy this is stated in one of the opening anthems – In the midst of life we are in death; from whom can we seek help? We seek help from God, knowing Jesus walks beside us in our suffering, and we help one another to bear the crosses of this life.

Think about the shape of the cross. A vertical beam and a horizontal beam. The vertical beam shows the relationship between each of us and God. The horizontal beam shows the relationship we have with one another in community. Both the vertical and the horizontal are needed, because it's *not* all about me.

Jesus said that as followers we are to deny ourselves. Together in community we can move beyond our fears. Fear of the other, fear of failure, fear of rejection for standing up for what is right, and yes, even fear of death. To take up our cross is to hear the rest of the story, the good news that after death comes resurrection.

We can choose to hide in our home or in our church, too afraid to take up our own cross, much less help anyone else take up theirs. But that would be the hardest cross of all to carry – to go through life in fear, so overwhelmed by the fear that you never hear the promise. Jesus underwent suffering and rejection and was killed, and after three days *he rose again!* Jesus showed his followers how to live life, not fear it; how to proclaim, heal, feed, and include everyone! The disciples eventually moved past their fear; they believed and followed Jesus. And on the way to their own crosses, they were so compelling that they hauled in nets full of people.

Follow me, and I will make you fish for people. If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

We can allow fear to control our lives, making fear our god, or we can take up our cross and participate in the saving love of God right here, right now, in this world. Amen.



Christ Carrying the Cross, Hieronymus Bosch