

February 28, 2024
Second Sunday in Lent

“The Things of God”

Mark 8:27-28

If you're like me, you've never really blamed Peter for his reaction to Jesus' words. When asked, Peter correctly states of Jesus, “You are the Christ.” Peter believes. Peter is a disciple of Jesus—a follower. He doesn't really have a clue what it really means, but Peter proclaims Jesus as the promised Messiah.

And then Jesus, for the first time, *“began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.”* And like I said, I never blamed Peter for rebuking Jesus about this. I mean, how would you react, say, if you'd gone into business with somebody and things were going great, profits were increasing, customer base was growing and then your partner says, “And now we're going to slash prices, drive the entire venture into bankruptcy and once all the money is gone and we're in debt up to our eyeballs, then we'll start it all over again!” You'd rebuke him, wouldn't you? That's crazy talk!

But, this is Jesus, so it's not crazy talk. Peter is indeed out of line here and deserves Jesus' rebuke, *“Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”*

You see, I'm pretty sure when Peter says that Jesus is the Messiah, Peter has a much different idea of what Messiah is than what God's idea of Messiah is. Peter is thinking that Jesus is going to unite the people of Israel, maybe raise an army, and with the mighty hand of God miraculously fighting before them, they are going to trample all enemies and make their nation the premiere kingdom in all the world, with power, wealth, celebrity, prosperity, and every good thing you can imagine with Jesus as king and Peter right there along side him...maybe even beating out James and John for the right-hand seat. I think Peter's mind is definitely set on the things of man...and Jesus dying just doesn't fit well with that plan.

So yes, Peter deserves that rebuke, as Jesus goes on to explain. *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”*

Now the “deny himself” part of this statement shouldn't be tough to understand given the context. It's a First Commandment issue. Honoring “You shall have no other gods” means denying one's self, subjugating one's self to the will and authority of your Creator alone. Denying one's self means to be setting your mind on the things of God—something Peter was not at all doing here.

The “take up your cross” part is a little more complicated. A cross at the very least is a burden, a hardship. In the pre-crucifixion context it is also an object of shame and lowliness, even punishment and being despised—not enviable at all. Post-Calvary for believers it is a sign of loving sacrifice. Here the taking up of one's cross is inextricably tied to doing the will of the Father, serving just as Jesus came not to be served, but to serve. Taking up one's cross might be as mild as lifting up others in prayer or as severe as dying a martyr's death for standing in the Gospel.

When a lot of folks ponder this section of Scripture we naturally start wondering, “Well then, what is my cross to bear...and am I bearing it? It's a good question, but probably not the primary question we should be asking in light of this text. Admittedly, *“let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me”* is quite a weighty directive from Jesus. But let's not get ahead of ourselves. *“Get behind me Satan!”* is more alarming and I think the root cause of that response from Christ is where we should start.

When you awake in the morning and begin to go about your day, answer yourself honestly, is your mind on the things of God or on the things of men? Seriously, what is your mission?

Our fallen nature defaults to following the goals our culture prioritizes: make money, be popular, be successful, fulfill your base desires for comfort, make yourself happy...put yourself and your happiness as the top priority, serve...yourself, you and yours. I'm pretty sure that's the camp Peter was in that earned Christ's rebuke.

We baptized believers are to intentionally avoid that trap. Each one of us should wake up in the morning and aspire to live for God as his servant. Why? Because the life we live to Him is not the life of this world! The life we live is already the eternal life Christ has gifted us through His resurrection in our baptism. We are living forever! We just endure this fallen life in service to God as He leads us through it to glory everlasting! This is why St. Paul can say "*we rejoice in our sufferings,*" because even our suffering is leading to glory!

"Whoever would save his life will lose it," says Jesus. Of course this is true. If you live for yourself in this life, yourself and this life ends! Duh! *"But whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it."* If you live life for Christ it may be tough, it may be suffering, it may even be dying—but you live forever in glory! The math is not tough here.

So you wake up and say your prayers, asking the Holy Spirit to lead you to set your mind on the things of God. Throughout the day when you catch yourself sinning, or maybe just in a selfish mindset on the things of man, you prayerfully do a repentant reset toward the things of God. This is the life of the redeemed, seeking not only God's forgiveness, but His leading, His will, His service through your hands, feet and mouth.

In living this way you don't really have to worry about what exactly taking up your cross entails. It will just happen as opportunities to serve the Lord present themselves in your life.

The trap folks fall into is that we get thinking "taking up our cross" is a certain task or practice we must accomplish and if we can if we can figure out what that is, then we can work it into our plans for our life and check it off our "spiritual to-do list" and be done. That is still setting one's mind on the things of man—trying to fit the "God stuff" into the life you want here.

"For what can a man give in return for his life?" The answer is: nothing. There is no task that saves this broken earthly life for you—it's broken! It ends!

Jesus gives new and eternal life, but living that life means living now to His glory with a mind set on the things of God. And, like the human life Jesus lived here, it means a life of loving service, struggling against our fallen nature to keep our eyes on the prize and setting our minds on the things of God.

This is important, obviously. Jesus finishes up saying, *"For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."*

Because of the context I am pretty sure that Jesus is speaking here of folks who find the humble, serving way of setting one's mind on the things of God and following in the way of Christ as too lowly and shameful so they choose instead to chase the glory of this world, setting their minds on the things of man. Well, just ponder what this world's glory will look like next to that of God in Christ on the Last Day. If that's what you're holding onto then...talk about shameful.

Set your mind on the things of God, knowing that the mind of God is to save you for His kingdom. Remember that rebuke, "Get behind me Satan!" Know that in Christ it is not directed at you. In Christ you use it, aimed at whatever of this world seeks to part you from your Savior.

Amen.

