

A Multitude of Crosses
Message for North East United Methodist Church
2nd Sunday of Lent
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Mark 8: 31-38 (NKJV) - *And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He spoke this word openly. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, "Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men." When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."*

Jesus has traveled throughout Galilee and the surrounding countryside, preaching to the masses of the Kingdom of God, healing, performing miracles... Jesus has healed the demon-possessed, has calmed the storm, has walked on water, has brought back a young girl from the dead, and has fed five thousand with a few fish and loaves. Many touch Him and are made well. The blind are healed.



The disciples travel with him...witness these miraculous moments...many flock to see Jesus...the streets are full every time He arrives in a town with onlookers, men and women who just want to touch the *“hem of His garment.”*

At any moment, Jesus could have probably raised a revolution against the Roman oppressor...He certainly had the followers...He also had many enemies...

Jesus knew that He would have to die...the mission God had Him on would cost Him His life. Jesus shares this with His disciples on multiple occasions and even with the crowds in the Temple, the Pharisees, after He chases the moneychangers out...*“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up,”* Jesus shouts, speaking of Himself, His body.

Only three years in ministry, Jesus sets His face *“resolutely”* to Jerusalem, to His death, to fulfilling His mission.



In the moment before His arrest, as He knelt in the garden of Gethsemane, distressed, He allowed Himself to pray for deliverance...if there was another way that God would find it and allow the cup of suffering to be taken from Him...but He never said, “I can’t” or “Never”...Jesus said, *“...not what I will, but what you will.”*

Jesus did not give up...not so He Himself could be lifted up but so you and I could be lifted up...Jesus was able to say from the cross, *“It is finished.”*

In our Gospel reading today, this second Sunday of Lent, Jesus explains to His disciples that *“...the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.”* Jesus would have to die.

Peter *“...took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying,*



“Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.”

Are we mindful of the things of God or are we mindful of the things of man?

Jesus instructs that our minds must be set on walking the road with Christ... God wants us to set goals for our lives, our faith... God wants these goals to reflect our purpose... the reason for which we were created... God wants our goals to reflect our love for Him and one another... Unfortunately, for many, goals are worldly and superficial, producing no lasting change or benefit to eternity... focused on the *“things of men.”*

“God is the only goal worthy of man’s efforts.”

-St. Augustine

Paul writes in **Philippians 3: 13-14 (NIV)** - *“Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”*

God spoke through the prophet **Jeremiah 29:11 (NLT)** - *“For I know the plans I have for you, ... They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.”*

God has plans for our lives... we were created for a purpose... and our goals must be connected into the God that placed us here... You could reach all your personal goals, become a raving success by the world’s standards, and still miss the purposes for which God created you.

As Henry Blackaby writes,



“Picture in your mind a tall ladder leaning against a wall. Now think about your life as a process of climbing that ladder. Wouldn’t it be a tragedy to get to the top of the ladder and find you placed it against the wrong wall? One life to live and you missed it.”

Are we mindful of the things of God or are we mindful of the things of man?

Jesus doesn’t just teach His disciples and us that we are to be mindful of the *“things of God,”* that He has to suffer to bring about the fulfillment of God’s plan, but Jesus makes it clear that we too must suffer.

Mark 8: 34-35 (NKJV) - *“Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it.*

Perhaps our response to such a statement mirrors Peter’s... followers must also take up their cross and lose themselves for the sake of the gospel...this is not good news, is it? There is suddenly more to being a disciple of Jesus than watching Him heal and hearing Him teach...there is suddenly more to being a disciple of Jesus than coming to church, serving on a committee, or attending a Bible study...

Joseph D. Small writes, *“Even during Lent, we may prefer to look backward at the compassionate and welcoming Jesus, and forward to the triumphant Christ, without pausing to reflect on the agonizing bloody death that is the focus of the gospel.”*

Jesus makes it clear...if we are to lean the ladder against the correct wall...if we are to fulfill the purpose and plan God has for each of us...if we are to *“press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called [us] heavenward in Christ Jesus,”* we must be ready and willing to suffer as Jesus suffered... We must carry our cross...

What does that mean? Carry our cross? Suffer as Jesus suffered?

Paul C. Shupe explains it this way:

*The church that rightly lifts high the cross of Christ all too often neglects the narrative of faith articulated in Jesus' teaching here: that discipleship involves giving up our own lives through sacrificial love, leading to the surprising and ultimately saving discovery that in giving we have received. We know this, of course. We preach it on occasion, and sometimes even live it out, too. Frequently the final words of worship – our benedictions to the congregation – are exhortations to go forth to love and serve God. But the absence of permanent symbols of Jesus' call to take up our own crosses, to be his disciples by taking full responsibility for going ourselves on the sacrificial journey that Jesus pioneered, perhaps helps to explain why churches become preoccupied with membership and not with discipleship. Perhaps what we need is **a multitude of crosses**, one for each of us, at the back door of our sanctuaries, to be taken up as we return to the world of home and family, work and commerce, service and play – symbols of the call to discipleship that we have heard and accept anew.*

Shupe goes on to write:

In these forty days [of Lent] we may contemplate not only the wonderful power of the cross of Christ, but the power inherent in taking up our own crosses too. Opportunities are daily before us, times when we may give our lives sacrificially to acts of love, compassion, justice, and peace, even in the face of the same imperial forces of sin and death that confronted Jesus. In this season, we are wise to ponder, not only the cross or crucifix in our sanctuaries, but the picture of Jesus on the road to Jerusalem, calling all his disciples to take up our crosses and to walk with him in paths of love and service.

As you climb your ladder, follow Christ, live out your walk of faith...as you contemplate what God wants you to do and where God wants you to go...Keep these three points in mind...

First, **God's Goal and Purpose is God-Sized and Requires Sacrifice.**

Michael Slaughter writes, "You must be able to conceive an idea before you can achieve it! God wants to birth a miracle through your life's work, but you must be willing to receive it by submission to Jesus' authority in your life."

Therefore, we must first surrender to God, asking Him to show us what it is He wants to accomplish through us...we must ask God to give us a vision, a big picture...what has been called a **BHAG (Big Hairy Audacious Goal)**...any goal or purpose God has for us to fulfill, carrying our cross, will only be accomplished with His help. It will be much too huge a vision to fulfill on our own strength.

Not only are God's goals God-sized but require, in every case, great sacrifice.

God gave Abraham the goal of going to a new land and creating a people that would birth a Messiah. God gave Moses the goal of freeing a people from slavery and carrying them through the wilderness to the Promised Land. God gave David and Solomon the goal of building the Temple, of bringing peace to the land. God gave Jeremiah and Isaiah the goal of preaching destruction for the sins of the people, but also hope for the restoration of Israel in the future. God gave His Son, Jesus Christ, the goal of going to Jerusalem. God gave Paul the goal of taking the Gospel message to the Gentiles. God gave John the goal of writing to the churches and sharing with them a vision of Christ's final victory through the book of Revelation. All of these men sacrificed and suffered as they strived to be faithful to God's purpose for their lives, to the vision God gave them, to the cross they were asked to carry.

I am reminded of a project I was involved in back in Seaford...our Ministerial came up with the idea to put the Jesus film in every mailbox in the Seaford zip code...the price for such a goal was \$25,000...we had no money...It was a God-sized goal, only possible with Him, and it had been placed on our hearts...so we picked up our cross and asked others to pick up theirs and sacrifice...we worked hard...gave generously...and we raised the money in three months time...and every household received the story of Christ on DVD.

What is your God-sized goal? What is God speaking to your heart?

Secondly, **God Wants the Goals We Press Towards to Be From Him.**

Sometimes God-sized goals can be from the world or from our own needs and desires. The best example of this is in Genesis 11.

The people in Genesis that built the tower of Babel had a goal in mind. And it was a God-sized goal...a tower that "*reaches to the skies – a monument to our greatness.*" Even though it was a God-sized goal, God was not behind it. God had not been sought in its conception, nor had God been sought in helping achieve the vision.

Bill Hybels, in his book, Courageous Leadership, gives a set of questions that we need to ask as we seek God's Will for our lives, as we set goals based on God's direction...these questions are printed in this week's devotion...



1. Have you yielded yourself fully enough to God?
2. Have you asked God to unveil his vision for your life, or are you asking him to bless a plan that you've already come up with? We must come to God with empty hands and an open heart and ask, "What is your vision for my life?"
3. Have you fasted?
4. Have you prayed?
5. Have you been quiet and waited on God in solitude?
6. Have you cleaned up the sinful patterns in your life?
7. Have you weeded out the distractions and ambient noise that would keep you hearing what God is trying to say to you?
8. Have you read avidly? Have you exposed yourself to the kaleidoscope of visions that God has given others so that you can be inspired by the variety of options? See what God is doing [and then join Him].

Are you living your life, working toward a goal that is not only God-sized, but God-given?

Lastly, in working toward our God-sized, God-given goals...in focusing on the "*things of God*" rather than the "*things of man*," **God wants us to never quit.**

Jesus had His goal...Jerusalem...the scriptures say, **Luke 9:51**, "*As the time drew near for his return to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.*"

Through the garden of Gethsemane and His distress, Jesus pressed forward, to do His father's business...through beatings, criticism, threats, abandonment, loneliness, and even nails placed in his hands and feet...Jesus pressed forward to the goal...the goal of salvation...of love for you and me...

Don't ever quit...what God can do through any one of us who is willing to sacrifice self for the goal...for the vision that God has placed within us...is nothing short of miraculous...extraordinary...You may feel you are facing an impossible situation but the Bible says, **Ephesians 3:20** - "*God is able to do far more than we would ever dare to ask or even dream of – infinitely beyond our highest prayers, desires, thoughts, or hopes.*"

May there be in our midst “*a multitude of crosses*”...



Will we walk out of the church each week and pick up our cross, ready to sacrifice for the mission, for our faith, for Christ?

Will we think and act on the “*things of God*” and not the “*things of man*”?

Will we rebuke Jesus as Peter did when things get tough...or will we recognize that resurrection, new life, is found through the valley of suffering and beneath the shadow of the cross?

Will we be willing to sacrifice for the vision God has placed inside of each of us, in order to build up the Kingdom of God?

Will we be willing to surrender our desires and wants in order to fulfill the plan and purpose God has for each of us and our church?

During this season of Lent, let us make sure our ladder is against the correct wall and let us climb it boldly and with faith, knowing Christ climbs with us. Let us not be afraid to love and serve sacrificially...to love and serve even if it hurts...

Let us shout with great faith, “*Get behind me, Satan*”...*I am mindful of the things of God, not the things of men. And when the Son of Man “comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels” and finds me, He will not be ashamed.*