

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Rev. Dr. Daris Bultena

March 8, 2009

2nd Sunday in Lent

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous." Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."

Mark 8:31-38

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."

"My Cross Pen"

Many of us have one. It is a standard in graduation gifts. I know I got one years and years ago as a graduation gift. A Cross pen. It is one of those really nice pens that you can buy refill cartridges for when it runs out

of ink. It is not your standard ordinary Bic pen or cheap clickie kind. No it is a good pen.

It is a standard in graduation gifts. I would bet that many people who get them do what I did with mine. I did not use it. I did not carry it in my pocket. I remember that mine came in a nice hard box that was covered in blue fabric. I left the pen in the box. I did on carry it in my pocket. I never clipped in my book bag or put it in the pencil cup on my desk. Oh no. Definitely not. It was too good of a pen for it to get mingled in with the ordinary one. And it was too good of a pen to carry and use for daily use. It was a good pen—so there was that mentality of save it. Reserve it. Hold it. Keep it for later for that really good use.

And so my Cross pen was reserved for later use. Where is it now? I frankly do not know. I looked quick in my desk drawer the other day and I did not see that case in there. I'm not really sure at all where it is. I know I still have it. I have it somewhere. I would not have gotten rid of it. Hey, its too good to get rid of. The reality of it is it is lost in my clutter somewhere because it was too good to use for daily use.

It is sort of sad that I never really had the pleasure of carrying it around and using it because it was too good for that. It was really sort of pointless to hang onto it for some later, unknown time where I would have been more worthy of using it or less at risk of losing it. The irony is found in the fact that I reserved it so I would not lose it, and now I have reserved it so long and so well that it is lost.

*

It is what happened to Peter. Not that he had a pen to loose, rather that the words of Jesus were lost on him. Peter clearly had moment when he was in full grasp of his reality. Jesus had asked them who they were saying that he was. Then he very pointed asked them who they say that

he is. It was Peter who had the insight. It was Peter who spoke right up. It was Peter that made it clear; he said the words. “You are the Messiah.”

And then immediately that insight and clarity is lost on him. Jesus goes on to tell them very clearly that the Son of Man must suffer, die, and on the third day be raised from the dead. And Peter rebukes Jesus. He pulls him aside, puts his arm around him and in that deliberate corrective voice tells Jesus—“no, that will not happen, you need to stop talking that way.”

It is then Jesus who rebukes Peter. Peter is the one who needs to be pulled aside. But Jesus is very public with this rebuking. It is not a gentle Jesus here that says, “now Peter, pay attention, I think you missed what you said to me.” Not the Jesus that we meet here in the gospel of Mark. Jesus says very clear, “Get behind me you Satan.” You have completely lost what I was saying.

Then Jesus speaks those very powerful words that were ever so sharp to first century followers of Jesus. “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

*

You see the reality of the cross is not like the Cross pen. You know that good pen that is pulled out only for special occasions. It is saved and reserved for the right moment. No, that is not the reality of the cross. Instead we are to walk in the shadow of the cross.

Yes, we are to walk in the shadow of the cross. It is to be before us all the time. We dress them all up and make them look nice. We have

beautiful crosses in the front of our sanctuaries and hanging on our walls. We adorn ourselves with them as jewelry. And all too often in all that splendor the reality of the cross is lost on us.

We miss the reality that walking the way of the cross calls us to remember the suffering of Jesus and that pattern is overlaid onto our reality and our walk through life. I think we want to say with the gentle Jesus who is depicted gathering the lambs in his arms on the sweet grassy hillside. That is so much more comfortable than the bloody suffering Jesus.

We are called to walk in the shadow of the cross knowing that the way is not an easy way. We are called to walk in the shadow of the cross knowing that the way is not through power but through weakness. The dying Christ on the cross appears to the world as the epitome of weakness, while in reality it is that very weakness that is the strength of the God.

So our weakness, where we give up our power... our weakness, where we know the suffering of our humanity—that is walking in the shadow of the cross. “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

To deny ourselves...oh how we want things to go the way we want them to go. We have very clear ideas of how life should be. We know what we want for ourselves and we know what we want for our loved ones too. And in those moments of retrospection we can vision how we believe it should be for the whole of the world too. We want it to go the way that we want it to go.

We do not want any bumps in the road. We do not want any bumps along the way. We do not want surprises and shocks to how we planned it. We think that we should have it the way that we want it to be.

The reality of it is there are all these stops along the highway of living. There are all these bumps in the road. Life is like our church parking lot—its filled with holes and cracks and dips and hazards. To deny ourselves and take up the cross and follow is to embrace the truth that no matter how much energy and planning we put into it we will never be able to figure out exactly what is coming next, and we sure will never be able to have it all under our control.

We need to reckon with the reality that being God’s disciple, being a follower of Jesus, does not mean that our living will be easy. Our living will be filled with bumps and surprises; our living will be filled with suffering and crosses. Yet to live this life in Christ following in that way of the cross is to live our best life.

Oprah and Oprah’s radio program talks about living your best life. We live our best life as we live fully in Christ knowing that the way is not easy but that we are held in the love of God. Our faith is a promise of God’s sustaining presence no matter what comes our way. That faith does not wipe away life’s hardships, rather it calls us not to fear them as we know that God will see us through.

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

To follow is to trust. To follow is to trust.

To follow him is to trust him. To follow him is to trust him.

To follow Jesus is to trust him. To follow Jesus is to trust him.

If you get nothing else get that. To follow him is to trust him. And we do not just trust in him when things are going well. We don’t just trust

in Holy Spirit's strength when the day is sunny and happy and warm. We also trust when the wind is blowing and its cold.

We trust also in that dark night of the soul. We trust when that inner voice inside of us tells us that there is nothing worth trusting in. Even there, and even then, in the valley of the shadow of death we trust in God's trustworthiness.

To follow is to trust. And that that trusting is to continue even when God calls us to face that which we don't want to face or to do that which we would rather not do.

When we lose our way. Oh, to follow is to trust. Yes, Peter, when we lose our way—to follow is to trust.

There was that clear moment when Peter got it and that clear moment when he lost his way. Listen to the way: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

Do we get it? Do we get it that if we have lost our way momentarily, or if we have lost it altogether, like that Cross pen—if we have lost it altogether then reclaim the cross. Not the pen, but the cross.

Walk in its shadow, live your best life knowing that you do not have anything to fear in your life. Trust and follow. I trust in the detail, and I invite you to trust in the detail too—in the encounter Jesus rebukes Peter, not to send him away but to call him back to the center of God's way. You see, we might lose pens, or even lose our way, but God never will lose us. God's movement is always towards us, always calling us back. That is what Jesus does for Peter...calls him back as he calls him back with us too in order to follow him. To trust him.

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up the cross and follow me.”

Don't worry about where your Cross pen is, but if you have lost the cross in your life, reclaim it this lent. Amen.