

**“Who is in the Driver’s seat?”**  
**by Rev. Frances Savill**  
**February 25, 2024**  
**Second Sunday of Lent**

**Mark 8:31-38**

*Jesus then began explaining things to them: “It is necessary that the Son of Man proceed to an ordeal of suffering, be tried and found guilty by the elders, high priests, and religion scholars, be killed, and after three days rise up alive.” He said this simply and clearly so they couldn’t miss it.*

*But Peter grabbed him in protest. Turning and seeing his disciples wavering, wondering what to believe, Jesus confronted Peter.*

*“Peter get out of my way! Satan, get lost! You have no idea how God works.”*

*Calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, “Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You’re not in the driver’s seat; I am. Don’t run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I’ll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to saving yourself, your true self. What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you? What could you ever trade your soul for? ”*

*“If any of you are embarrassed over me and the way I’m leading you when you get around your fickle and unfocused friends, know that you’ll be an even great embarrassment to the Son of Man when he arrives in all the splendor of God, his Father, with an army of the holy angels.” (Eugene Peterson, “The Message” Mark 8:31-38)*

If we take the great commission that Jesus gave the church, as we have it recorded at the end of Matthew’s gospel, chapter 28. Jesus commands:

1. “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and
2. Teach them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”

Many of us have been baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Part 1 of the church’s mission has been completed in us. We are working on Part 2 of the church’s mission. We are learning to obey everything Jesus commanded. We are working on living as Jesus lived and are working to follow where he leads and obey his calling in our lives.

Simply, what did Jesus teach?

This morning, we have a very clear, but very difficult word from Jesus. Mark's gospel says that Jesus spoke to disciples clearly about the path he was going to have to walk. This passage of scripture has no parables, no fancy, flowery, difficult language, or story to decipher.

Jesus clearly told the disciples that the Son of man must suffer and die. And then he went on to say: "If anyone wants to be my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

What does it mean to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus? Simply put, we are to set aside our own desires, our own agendas, our own self-seeking and self-serving ways and plans and we learn Jesus' way.

When we choose the path of the cross, we choose to go where Jesus leads. Daily, hourly, again and again we put Jesus in the driver's seat. Simply that is what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Jesus is in front, we follow him.

The path of the cross is not an easy path. It is a path that leads through brokenness. It is a path of obedience, of giving up self-will, self-pride, a humble way, and choosing again and again to go the Lord's way. It is the path Jesus walked and it is the path his disciples- his apprentices, his followers walk still. The way of the cross looks different in different people's lives, for Jesus' call to each person is as unique as the person Jesus calls. It is very often a path that is misunderstood.

Peter makes a brilliant confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah of God. He is the one who boldly confesses the great truth, and yet in the very next breath, he is the Tempter's instrument against Jesus, and Jesus sternly rebukes Peter: *Peter, get out of the way*. Peter's name means rock, and the rock (Peter) that Jesus would build his church upon, was in danger of being a stumbling rock for the other disciples and for Jesus. "Get behind me Satan!"

Peter spoke the words of the world, Jesus must not die, the Messiah will not die, the path of the Messiah is glorious victory. What Peter and the others did not know, was indeed it will be glorious victory, but victory that came through death, and humiliation, and the way of the cross.

Who can understand God's plan for Jesus?

After the cross, after Jesus' death, after the resurrection, after Jesus came back and explained it all, the disciples understood, but not before that.

Jesus didn't ask his disciples to understand God's ways. He did not give us all wisdom and all knowledge to discern the plans of God. Disciples were not commanded to understand. They were told ***to follow and trust***, and sometimes to endure misunderstanding, and walk a path that is not always illumined clearly, and that is often a path of suffering, for what cross is not painful.

The way of the cross, though, is ultimately the way to glory, and the way to life. "For those who want to save their life," says Jesus, "will lose it in me."

The cross is the way of salvation. The way of the cross ultimately says: *not my will, but your will be done, O Lord.*

When many people think of bearing their cross, and self-sacrifice and the church, often they think of money. People sacrificed financially for us. We have this beautiful sanctuary, the functional building, on this land, and a long history of good ministry in this community, because people sacrificed.

And if this church is going to fulfill Jesus' mission to make disciples and baptize and teach people to obey Jesus' teaching we will have to continue to sacrifice financially.

But taking up our cross, living Jesus' way, much more is required than that. In the church people are not promoted. Sometimes they are given greater responsibilities, sometimes they are given positions of leadership. But these are asked to be the greatest servants. These are asked to serve above or below all others. These are asked to sacrifice most, and frankly they are honoured least. When you have done every job in the church, when you are great in the kingdom, and great in God's church, we ask you to step aside, we ask you to mentor others to take your place. We ask you to lay down your rights and put everyone else's interests above yours.

When you have served in the church all your life, we ask you to have the mind that was in Christ Jesus, who took up his cross to give life. We ask you to give up some of your comfort and move to the centre of the pew or move forward, to leave the best seats for visitors, or leave the best parking spaces for newcomers who are often late.

We ask long-time mature members, or those who are mature in Christ to sacrifice their time. Come early and greet and put the coffee on. Stay late and clean up. It's a sacrifice offered to God so others will feel welcomed and cared for here.

And as we who are baptized, who have faith in Christ, give up our rights, and learn to be servants, we find we are really learning to do all that Jesus commanded us to do and that we are becoming like him.

Cross bearing is not always in big, great sacrifices, often it is in small, difficult day by day decisions, that we learn the weight of the cross, and to bear it with our Lord.

Does this all sound like bad news? I hope not, because Jesus tells us that this is the path to life. It doesn't look like to the world... it doesn't look like life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

But as those who look to Jesus, we find real freedom, so we are not gripped by the bondage of needing to have my own way or being enslaved to the never-ending demands of my desires. It's the freedom to find a new way to be fulfilled, and experience abundant life.

Happiness isn't something that can be chased and grasped, bought to earned. But peace, joy, love, patience, kindness, are the fruit of the spirit that is not *chasing* Jesus, but *following* him, learning to do life yoked to him every moment of every day.

It's surprising really that the way of the cross is the way of life. It doesn't make sense to us.

But on the other hand, when we consider Jesus, the most amazing person who ever lived, who everyone wanted to be around, who reached out and taught and healed and saved and brought abundant life to everyone who reached out to him, who's breath gives us life, it really isn't surprising that following him, learning his ways, even the way of the cross, leads us to life to the full, and on through to eternity.

**Thanks be to God.**