



Pastor Gwen's Message

God Chose You

Sunday August 30, 2020

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

Our Gospel reading from Matthew today starts with Jesus telling about his death and resurrection. This is Jesus' first passion prediction and as we can imagine the disciples do not understand. They cannot grasp what He is saying to them. And as we see the story unfold, they will not understand until after the resurrection.

Peter, good old impulsive, outspoken Peter, has just identified Jesus as the Messiah and now Jesus tells him that he will suffer at the hands of the most religious men in Jewish tradition and the Romans will carry out that death sentence. How can it be that the Messiah, who came to save the world, will not save Himself? Peter cannot accept this news and so he takes Jesus aside and rebukes Jesus that He cannot let this happen. But this time Peter has crossed the line. He has questioned Jesus leadership and has gone way too far. Jesus puts Peter in his place and calls him Satan.

We have heard these words before, "get behind me Satan" when Jesus spoke them to Satan at the end of His wilderness temptation. Peter is told to go behind Jesus, physically and spiritually. Peter was to be the "rock" but now has become a "stumbling block". No one or nothing can deflect Jesus from his God-given path to the cross.

Jesus goes on to say, "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 will find it." WOW. This sounds a lot like costly grace or tough love, doesn't it?

I do believe that the intent here by Jesus is to let us know that it will not always be easy to be a disciple, to be a follower of Christ. We need to lose our life to find the abundant life that He is offering us. We will need to give up this earthly life to find our heavenly home. So, what do you suppose that will look like for us?

Well, a life of discipleship is not necessarily an easy one. To be a disciple we must surrender to a cause greater than our own, earthly cause. We must conform to the will of God instead of giving in to earthly pleasures. We should strive to please God, not men and try to become more like Jesus. If you will, we need to march to the beat of a different drum

to God's song. Often times it is a different beat than the world hears. We need to have a different mindset than what the world has.

But think with me for a minute, it is really the rest of the world that is out of sync. Disciples follow Jesus Christ. It is the world that is out of touch with true reality, not us. After all, we are chosen and called at our baptism to be a disciple and follow Christ. Named and called a child of God at our baptism, God chose us, you and me to be His disciples.

And God does not make mistakes. He didn't just randomly pick us to be disciples. God chooses every one of us purposefully. He knows our weaknesses and our strengths. God knows our abilities because after all he gave them to us. And he chooses us to be a beacon of light so that our lives can shine as help for those around us who do not yet know the love of Jesus.

Some of you have probably read this on the internet at one time or another. It is a letter about the disciples. It says:

To: Jesus, Son of Joseph
From: Jordan Management Consultants

Dear Sir,

Thank you for submitting the resumes of the twelve men you have picked for managerial position in your new organization. All of them have now taken our battery of test; and we have not only run the results through our computer, but also arranged personal interviews for each of them with our psychologist and vocational aptitude consultant.

As part of our service, we make some general comments for your guidance. This additional insight is given as a result of staff consultant and comes without any additional fee.

It is our opinion that most of your nominees are lacking in background, education and vocational aptitude for the type of enterprise you are undertaking. They do not have the team concept. We would recommend that you continue your search for persons of experience in managerial ability and proven capability.

Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to fits of temper. Andrew had absolutely no qualities of leadership. The two brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, place personal interest above company loyalty. Thomas demonstrates a questionable attitude that would tend to undermine morale. We feel that it is our duty to tell you that Matthew had been blacklisted by the Greater Jerusalem Better Business Bureau. James, the son of Alphaeus and also Thaddaeus definitely have a radial leaning and they both registered a high score on the manic-depressive scale.

One of the candidates, however, shows great potential. He is a man of ability and resourcefulness, meets people well, has a keen business sense and has contacts in

high places. He is highly motivated, ambitious and responsible. We recommend Judas Iscariot as your controller and right-hand man.

We wish you every success in your new venture.

**Sincerely,
Jordan Management Consultants.**

Well, obviously Jesus did not use this management company to select his first 12 disciples. Thank God! He also does not use the ways of this world to choose you today. He chose you with a purpose in mind. God saw something great in you and He loved you so much He chose to adopt you into His own family and then set you in a place where you could grow and become a powerful disciple for God. A place where you can do great things for the Kingdom of God. SO know that you are not here by accident. You are chosen and loved by God.

But folks, being chosen is not enough. If we are really to be a disciple of Christ there is a path of life that we must walk that is far different from anyone around us who does not serve our Lord. In our reading from Matthew today we have heard those three things in Jesus' in one sentence, to the disciples, "If you want to be my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

First, we are to DENY OURSELVES. What this means is that we are to put God's work ahead of everything else in life. Our needs and wants must take a back seat to what God calls us to do.

Secondly, to be a disciple of Christ we must TAKE UP OUR CROSS. That means we need to endure the circumstances that life presents and handle the obstacles in daily life while following Jesus' teaching and still keep a right relationship with Jesus.

Third, to be a good disciple we must most importantly, FOLLOW JESUS. Reading His word, praying, worshiping are the ways we come to know Christ. Learning to be like Him in everyway, trusting Him and believing in Him certainly comes from spending time with Him.

The Christian life is not easy. In fact it can be downright difficult to live because yes, it is a sacrifice to live for Jesus instead of ourselves. It is some days difficult to deal with the demands of the world and not always easy to follow Jesus. Just think of what a better world it would be in Kenosha WI, if everyone would just follow Jesus. Love God and love your neighbor as yourself.

Luther said, "A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing and suffers nothing, is worth nothing." Great comment. As a disciple of Jesus we are called to take up our cross and follow Jesus even during the darkest days of our lives. Yes, we are all called to fight against injustice, racism, and learn to live in harmony with others. Even that is not too much for

Jesus to ask. He showed us how to live in harmony and what it means to love your neighbor, even when our neighbor, is different than us.

The price that God paid was enormous. He sent His only Son to death on a cross so that we could have abundant life, forgiveness and life everlasting. It is only through the grace of God and his unending love for us that we have such grace filled gifts. So, I urge you to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus. Strive to be a good disciple always, and you will live in the gentle grace and abounding love of Jesus Christ as you shine it forth for all the world to see. **AMEN**