

Sunday February 26
Lesson 13: Living for Others
Scripture: Matthew 16: 21-28

Context:

Today we conclude our final unit of this season with the theme, “Living for Others.” Today’s lesson focuses on the book of Matthew and the events to unfold after the infamous confession of the disciple of Peter and the revelation of Christ’s identity. Today’s focus will be to get behind Jesus’ understanding of sacrificial Lordship.

The background of the text and the preceding passage focuses on the confession of Peter. The confession can also be found in the gospel of Mark. In Mark’s version, Peter probably speaks for his fellow disciples, and there is no explicit insistence that this is the first moment of messianic faith.¹ However, Matthew alters the story by focusing on how the messianic confession is not due to idle human speculation as it is due to divine disclosure as Jesus praises Peter for naming the truth.² In the following verses, Jesus establishes Peter as the stone upon whom he will build his church. These verses establish for traditional Roman Catholicism the text as fundamental to the doctrine of successive popes as the foundation for the church’s authority.³ Peter’s confession leads to a responsibility placed upon him according to the gospel writer.

Following Peter’s confession is the announcement of the passion predicaments, our focus of today’s lesson. Up until this point in the gospel, Jesus has focused on his Galilean ministry and healing people. From this point forward until his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the emphasis is placed on Jesus’ preparation of the disciples for his death.⁴ Yet more importantly, the theological message of this announcement serves as the occasion for significant instruction concerning what Jesus’ death means for the lifestyle of his followers.⁵ Jesus continues to emphasize this is something which must happen.

Peter quickly gives a rebuttal to Jesus as he asserts Jesus cannot suffer or die. Historically, his response is comprehensible as there was no contemporary Jewish thought at the time to a reference of a suffering Messiah in the Hebrew scriptures.⁶ Jesus’ response is like that of a teacher, pushing the disciple to be the follower.

Jesus then gives sayings about being a disciple. Being a disciple is not just about confessing Christ as Lord; it is about a practice of suffering and finding one’s cross. There is an

¹ Hare, Douglas R.A. “Matthew.” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2009), 189.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 190.

⁴ Ibid., 193.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 194

element of fearlessness instead of martyrdom in following the Lord.⁷ One must give of oneself in following Jesus just as Jesus gave himself up.

Application

Have you ever met someone with a “martyr complex?” These individuals are often those who feel the need to do everything or take care of everyone. They believe if someone doesn’t do something, then nothing will get done. At times, the martyr can even be heroic, moved to a sense of urgency to save the day and have a plan.

Yet some “martyrs” are quick to let others know what moves them. They have no problem letting others know of their sacrifices without even naming how they volunteered to participate in those issues. And then there are people who like to play the “martyr complex,” when they say they are persecuted and yet if you look close enough, there is no real sacrifice to be made.

I often think of those with a “martyr complex” and how they might fare in meeting Jesus and his words on the way to Jerusalem. The passion predictions make clear Jesus is marching onward to suffering and death. Even more interesting is how he invites those who follow him to give of themselves in the journey. His suffering and death will mean something for his followers, and it might even cost them their lives.

As Jesus words were recorded, there was truth to what would happen to some of his disciples. We read of Stephen being the first martyr in the book of Acts as there is an angry mob to hurl stones at him. And of course, early Christian history is replete with stories of bishops, church fathers and mothers, and individual Christians being martyred for their faith.

These martyrs’ deaths, though while significant and extremely important to the Christian tradition, has led to its own set of issues for the Christian church. As a result of their deaths, there have been times when Christians have sought times to be witnesses for Christianity, even hoping for a martyrdom as to show to others of the devoted nature of their faith. One doesn’t have to look much more past the Crusade or church splits to see how people are moved by a mentality of “taking a side,” and leading on in the name of Jesus.

The issue with martyrdom becomes how we approach and tie it to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In the passage we read today, Jesus is speaking to people who are trying to figure him out. The early church will have to make decisions for the future being the minority group in a pagan empire notorious for power and control. And there will be questions around time, resources, money, and power.

I think today to say Jesus is our Lord is both a privilege and a challenging declaration. For American Christians it should especially step on our toes as we got rid of monarchy at our conception; the idea of us owing anything to anyone goes beyond our natural tendencies. And yet this is what Jesus asks us to do: to make him the Lord of our lives and to give everything to him. A lord is someone who receives time, energy, gifts, resources, and our very being.

Yet I have come to find there is beautiful freedom in seeking Jesus as Lord. We are reminded nothing is completely ours and often what Jesus asks of us allows us to grow and bloom in ways we would never on our own. We use our spiritual gifts to bring him glory and he uses them to touch others. We give our tithes to him, and we see growth individually and collectively in a community of faith. We give our time and God gives us new views of the world and what God is doing in our midst.

⁷ Ibid., 195.

A few weeks ago, my sister and I reflected on being a parsonage family and the connectional polity found in the United Methodist Church with itineracy moving pastors and their families from place to place. We observed how it was always scary initially: you would miss your people and your home, finding yourself in a new place and hoping you would find love and acceptance. We discovered even as children and teenagers who struggled with itineracy at times, the experiences have helped us as adults to see the beauty of Jesus as our Lord. He was working through our lives then to learn about surrender and control and being blessed and transformed in the journey.

With Jesus as our Lord, we are honestly not given as many guarantees as the world gives. Jesus as our Lord means our world is changed and at times we might face suffering, a lack of material gain, and unpredictability. Yet Jesus promises we receive him, and we will be transformed as we take a cross and follow him.

What do you think is rewarding about the cost of discipleship? How do you proclaim Jesus as Lord of your life? Why do you think the “martyr complex” is so tempting for Christians? Who are people you think who have made Jesus as the Lord of their lives and this radiates in everything they do? How have you seen making Jesus the Lord of your life lead to transformation in you? In others?

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