



“Cross Way”

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost
Saturday and Sunday, September 15-16, 2018

All Services

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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 116:1-9;
James 3:1-12; Mark 8:27-38

Grace and peace be to you from our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

So when you're a pastor you get asked all sorts of questions, and a lot of times those questions are asked when I am in the gathering space or perhaps someone will call and make an appointment and want to talk to me in the office, and sometimes I might just be on the line to McDonalds getting ready to order that Big Mac and if I have my collar on there's going to be lots of times people have come up to me and ask me all sorts of religious or spiritual questions that they were struggling with. Some of those are simple ones like you know; is there a God? You know. What is heaven like? Is there a hell? What's the "right" religion? Does God really answer our prayers?

In today's gospel we have another such question and it really gets to the heart of "Who is Jesus?" Now in 2018 the Pew Research Center offered a report on ex-Christians under the age of 35. These are often referred to as the "nones" because when they ask what religion you are they just say "none." According to the Pew Report most religious "nones" left because they had a lot of questions about religious teaching. They "don't like the positions that their churches took on social or political issues." To a lesser extent the "nones" agreed with some statements. "I don't like religious organizations" (34%). "I don't like religious leaders" (31%). (Sorry Pastor Brock) or "religion is irrelevant to me" (26%).

Now this survey didn't ask them to put their objections in their own words of how they came to unbelief, but an earlier report in 2016 asked them to put it into their own words. And in this study, most of the "nones" said they no longer identified with a religious group because they no longer *believed it was true*. And when asked *why* they didn't believe, many of them said that their views on God had "evolved" or some reported that having a "crisis of faith." They saw religious beliefs as unreasonable or requiring "blind" faith and they left their churches because they didn't think that they could find anyone to help them answer their spiritual questions.

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus says to the disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" They offer some traditional responses. Some thought maybe John the Baptist had miraculously come back to life in the person of Jesus even though just a couple chapters before he lost his head. But others said, maybe he's Elijah, after all Jewish people feel that at

some point Elijah will come back in bodily form. Some said maybe he is just another one of the prophets, again reincarnated. But their answering to this question of “Who do people say that I am?” are very traditional and pat answers to those questions. Kind of like if I asked you the question “Do you like ice cream and kittens?” You probably all say, well sure, sure. You know what the answer to that is.

But then Jesus gets a little more personal with the question. It's not just who the people say that I am, Jesus wants to know Who do you say that I am? And the always impetuous Peter steps through the crowd of disciples and says, “You are the Messiah.” Jesus the itinerate preacher, who announced the coming kingdom of God; that long-awaited moment when God, in power and majesty, would rule Israel, and ultimately rule the world. When God's justice and mercy that the Bible proclaimed and all of Israel hoped for would finally come to fruition.

Gone would be the injustice that the people saw in the world. Gone would be oppression, and corruption and inhumanity. All of the miracles of Jesus, his teachings, his healings, his casting out evil demons, all of them lead to this moment – Jesus calling out and asking the disciples “Who do you think I am?” And their answer is. . . the Messiah, the King, the anointed one, the one who had been announced by prophets hundreds of years before, longed for in Jewish pray and worship for centuries, Jesus the Messiah, is in the building!

Many expected this Messiah-King to be one who would form an army to put the Pharisees and Sadducees and the other religious leaders in their place, and to kick out the heathen Romans and other Gentile unbelievers from their holy lands.

If I were to ask you, who gives you the message of the gospel and what is it. . . you'd probably be able to answer that question pretty easily. Most of us would probably say, well Jesus gives us the gospel and the gospel at its most fundamental level is that “God loves you.” And you would be absolutely right.

But in Mark's gospel he decides to take it a step further. He is not going to answer just “Who,” but he wants to answer the question “How.” And there you see that in verse 31. “Then Jesus 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.”

Now if you break down some of the more important words of that particular verse we see first a title. Son of Man. Jesus uses that title for himself in a number of places in Mark's gospel. It is messianic language, it's language that refers to the Messiah who is to come, and it actually comes from the Book of Daniel in the seventh chapter. This Messiah was to be the great King who is going to rule the world. We also see that this Messiah is going to undergo great suffering and be rejected. This language is very similar and merges the language that we have in Isaiah's prophecy where he talks about the suffering servant. Now you would think that the elders and the chief priest and the scribes would be filled that the Messiah that they longed for and prayed for had finally come, but instead we find they are the ones who are rejecting Jesus. To the extent that he will die and rise, and there we have probably the two most important words in that

particular verse. He will be killed, and he will rise again. And with those words, with that concept, well that's too much for Peter. Peter pulls Jesus aside because the words that Jesus has just said to the Jewish ears are absolutely offensive, offensive and he needs to tell Jesus that. He rebukes him, like a parent does a child.

But Jesus' harsh rejection of Peter calling him Satan shows the importance of that verse 31, and it deals with nothing less than sacrifice, then dying for another. It shows its importance. Sacrifice after all is placing yourself in God's hands and saying, "your will be done, not mine." Jesus will say those same words right before he's crucified, and we know what sacrifice looks like, we've seen it before in history.

This past week we remembered the forty heroes who died in a field out in Shanksville on 9/11. And this past summer there were a couple movies that featured Winston Churchill the Prime Minister in World War II who told the British people that he had nothing to offer them but "blood, toil, tears, and sweat." And those symbols of sacrifice we see all around us, we put it on top of our steeples, we hang it around our neck in a cross, sometimes we put it on our skin, or on our walls, or on our hymn books. Sacrifice is about giving up, it's about giving up our comforts and our desires. Giving ourselves for the greater good, to be faithful to the mission that Christ has placed on our hearts and maybe even being ready to die for it. And we see people doing that all around the world today. Some have said this last century was the largest, the biggest century for the most martyrs the world has ever seen.

So how do we help the "nones" the "n-o-n-e-s?" How do we help people answer those spiritual questions that they are truly struggling with? I think it's simple. We are to share who Jesus is to us personally and we are to live sacrificially. In that way we are both to live in faith and in action. To sacrifice for something greater leads to inspiration, and inspiration leads to commitment, and commitment is saying "yes", yes to Jesus, "yes" to faith.

You and I should be a church of sacrifice that helps people walk in the way of the cross. Engaging those who struggle for answers in faith and life.

And at the same time, we too are journeying ourselves with Jesus. Following his life, being open to being changed by him in positive ways, having hope, experiencing forgiveness and mercy, knowing God and his son Jesus who gave his life for you and for me. "Love always involves responsibility," like Scottish biblical scholar William Barclay, "and love always involve sacrifice. And we do not really love Christ unless we are prepared to face His task and to take up His Cross."

That is the essence of following the way of the cross. Giving, so that others may live and know the one who gave his life for the sake of the world. Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

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