

St. John's Lutheran Church
The Second Sunday in Lent
February 28, 2021

"Cross Words!"

In the name of our risen Lord and Savior, ✠ Jesus Christ. Amen.

Mark 8:27-38 Theme: "The Things of God!"

Dear Children of God, your heavenly Father. You have been baptized out of the things of this world, the things of man, and into the things of God. You were given the gifts of salvation, the Holy Spirit, the forgiveness of sins, faith, and eternal life at the font. You have been baptized into God's kingdom of heaven where He lives and reigns to all eternity as will you by faith in Jesus.

God has given you life in His kingdom. And He wants you to know what you can expect as a Baptized child of God. The life of His Son Jesus went through the Cross, and so must yours. The things of God, and the people of God are tied to the Cross of Christ. And so today, we wrestle with the "cross words" in our Gospel reading from Mark. What does it mean to pick up your cross and follow Jesus in the things of God? And of course, it's important to know who Jesus is if you are going to take up your cross and follow Him.

Today we hear Jesus ask His Disciples the big question, "**Who do people say that I am?**" They said, "Who then is this that even the wind and sea obey him?" "He is possessed by Beelzebub." "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?" "He's John the Baptist raised from the dead." "He is Elijah." No one got it! No one saw Jesus for who He really was and is. They were blinded by their sin and didn't comprehend the fact that Jesus was the promised Messiah born to die on a Cross.

Ironically, the only ones in the first half of Mark's Gospel that knew who Jesus was, were the demons. "**I know who you are, the Holy one of God.**" "**What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?**" But Jesus needed to bring His disciples to the knowledge that He was the promised Messiah destined to die on the Cross and be resurrected after three days. So, when

Jesus asks His disciples "**who do you say that I am?**" and Peter answered, "**You are the Christ**" it showed that progress was being made.

By the end of Mark's Gospel, it becomes apparent that some got it, and some didn't and some never would. At the trial of Jesus, the Chief Priest and the Sanhedrin were still blind to who Jesus was, asking, "**Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?**" But the centurion at the foot of the Cross got it. "**Truly this man was the Son of God!**"

The Centurion, the Roman soldier, recognized who Jesus was by His suffering and death on the Cross. Jesus' suffering and death didn't hide Jesus' identity from him, it revealed it. Even the disciples at this point were way behind the Centurion in their understanding. They didn't completely get it.

Although Jesus plainly taught "**them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. And He said this plainly.**" They did not get it! No parables, no symbolism, no figures of speech. No hidden meanings. He gave it to them directly, to the point, and plainly. And they didn't completely understand that Jesus must die on a Cross.

Jesus even said that this "must" happen. That He "**must suffer.**" That little word "must" means that there's no getting around it. No compromise! No deals! That the Cross was the only way!

You and I don't like that little word, "must." We bristle when we're told that we "must" do something. When we're told we "must," we immediately begin thinking of reasons why we "must not." But not Jesus. This was the Father's "must" and Jesus was obedient in doing what His Father said He "must" do. Even if The Son of Man "must" suffer many things and be rejected and be killed and rise again. Jesus knew that His birth in a manger in Bethlehem would lead Him to the Cross of Calvary. It "must" be that way!

Jesus was determined to suffer on the Cross for you! If the people saw that Jesus was more than a prophet, they would have tried to keep Him from His destiny. They would have tried to put Him on a

throne instead of a Cross. They wanted an earthly king. They wanted the things of man.

If Peter had managed to tempt Jesus into pursuing the things of man, the “things” of God would not have been accomplished. Truly, there is no more satanically inspired thought than to keep Jesus from the Cross. There would be nothing more demonic than for Jesus to follow man's way instead of His Father's way, the things of God. No Cross! No Savior! No suffering! No salvation! No forgiveness of sin! No heaven for you and me!

No wonder our Lord told Peter, **“Get behind me, Satan!”** Peter was tempting Jesus with the same temptation satan had used while He was in the wilderness. These are cross words indeed! We would never keep Jesus from going to the Cross for us, would we? Of course not! Jesus being born to die on a Cross and everything in between, His entire life, was all about going to the Cross for you. These are the things of God! It was God's “thing!” It was His action for us that His only begotten Son would die for you that you may live. **“For God so loved the world.”**

Jesus paying the price for us. There is nothing we are more thankful for than the fact that Jesus resisted satan's temptations. Everything depended on Jesus dying and rising back to life! The manger. The Cross. The empty tomb. The things of God.

But what about the second part? What about our cross? Must you and I suffer the way Jesus did? Must we literally pick up our own cross and follow him? What does that mean, anyway? “Deny yourself, pick up your cross, and follow Jesus.”

I can't speak for your “self,” but my “self” wants nothing to do with suffering! My “self” has no desire to endure persecution. But fame and fortune, power and prestige, these are things my “self” desires. Yet these are the parts of myself I must deny if I am going to partake in the things of God. To desire such things, to expect God to prevent all suffering and grant us nothing but success in this world is to sell your soul to the devil. This is what Jesus was saying when He rebuked Peter. **“Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”**

And Jesus called to him the crowd with his disciples and said to them, **“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.”** These too, are “Cross Words.

Deny yourself, pick up your cross, and follow Jesus. Bearing your cross is not always the same as wearing a cross. Our culture seems to be okay with the cross as jewelry or as a fashion statement. But who wants a cross that means suffering and persecution for the name of Jesus? It's not as simple as putting up with someone you don't like. It's not as trivial as just thinking that when things don't go well it's your “cross to bear.” Bearing a cross means risking rejection, accepting ridicule, living with whatever unfairness might be a part of your life; because you are a child of God by Baptism into Christ's death and resurrection; and because you follow Christ and proclaim His Gospel.

Jesus warns us that having in mind the things of men keeps us away from the things of God. We can worship wealth; power; prestige and the things that the world values to the point of worshipping them as our god. And we follow them down a path that leads us away from the Cross of Jesus. If we intentionally seek these things, we run the risk of inviting God to leave our life—driving out the Holy Spirit.

Jesus' “Cross words” don't just tell us what to do. They tell us what Jesus did for us and that He gives us the things of God. And as you bear your cross Jesus has promised to never leave you or forsake you. He will be with you always. During Lent and throughout our lives we humbly follow our Lord to His Cross and carry ours. For it is on His Cross that we see Him take up our sins. The sins of the things of men. And the cross we carry proclaims Jesus as the only way, truth, and life. For no one comes to the Father but by Him. The things of God are yours, for you are His beloved child now and forever. In the name of Jesus. To God be the glory. Be still and know He is God! **Amen.**