

*31Then he 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. 32He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."*

*34He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. 36For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? 37Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? 38Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."*

I want to die in my sleep.

I can't tell you how many times members of the church have spoken those words to me. And I respond by saying, "Me, too." No suffering, no pain, no terror, just a peaceful slipping into death. I'll vote for that.

And when I dream of living I dream of getting away from the stresses and strains of daily living – vacations on tropical islands, climbing to the tops of mountains under blue sunny skies, witnessing the marvels of the created world, the tastes and sights and sounds of other cultures. That's really living.

Jesus has a different idea.

"Jesus began to teach them that the Son on 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. He said this all quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him."

Peter didn't want that for Jesus - undergoing great suffering, being rejected, being killed, then after three days rising again. Would you want that for someone you love? Of course Peter tried to set Jesus straight. What good could come out of pain, not just the physical pain but the pain of people turning against you, hating so much they kill. Better Jesus should set his heart on winning over the crowds and giving only what he could spare and living a long and peaceful life.

But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan, for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

How strange that Mark should tell us that Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, and then rebuked Peter. Peter had taken Jesus aside – away from the others for a private word. So why did Jesus turn and look at the disciples, and then rebuke?

I remember one other place where we read Jesus looked at someone and then spoke. A man came to Jesus wanting to know what he must do to be saved. And Mark tells us Jesus looking at him, loved him and said, “Go sell what you have and give it to the poor and come follow me.” Did Jesus’ love for the disciples lead him to rebuke Peter? I think so.

For Jesus’ next words spoken to the disciples and to the crowd are these: “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, and for the sake of the good news will save it.”

For Jesus and for those who belong to him life will not be found in comfort and security and staying safe. Jesus wants more for those he loves - more for you.

I think of my children. I want them to know the struggle of loving when loving is costly. They will be changed by that in a way that all the sunny beaches and fine restaurants will never change them. To be a parent is to love in that way – to watch and pray through a night of sickness, to ache when your child faces defeat, or rejection, to sorrow when sin has won the upper hand in your child’s heart, or fear has - to pray for faith and hope and courage knowing that only God will be able to provide these. I want those I love to be tested, not kept like some greenhouse plant – fragile - but set out in the winds and the scorching heat and growing hardy.

Jesus loved his disciples like that. Jesus loves you like that. He doesn’t want a soft and easy life of leisure for you but a testing, a giving, a growing in love.

I am convinced that God calls you and me into Christian community that we might challenge one another to follow Jesus. When one of you takes up a cross by sacrificing your time, your energy, your possessions for someone in need I learn what it is to be a follower of Jesus. Or when you see me turning away from a struggling sister or brother, or holding a grudge, or letting love grow cold, you are learning how those who follow Jesus act. Jesus looked at the disciples, and then he rebuked Peter. Maybe for himself he would have followed the easy way. Certainly in the garden of Gethsemane he prayed that God would approve of the easy way for him. But for them, for those he loved, he went to the cross - not to save himself, but to give himself.

I think about my parents. They said very little about sacrificing for others. But day after day, year after year they gave themselves for others. Sometimes it was in bringing children to church – in one case children that I and my siblings refused to ride with – they smelled. But my father made an extra trip to bring them. In other cases it was helping to build the 4-H camp on Kelley's island, or working with children who had difficulty learning.

I have asked Loretta Heindrichs to create a place where you can write down what you do as followers of Jesus. This is not about bragging but I am convinced that if we would learn what one another are doing, we would all be encouraged in taking up the cross and following. Today in the back are slips of paper and a board. Write your name on slip of paper and write down the ways you give yourself in this place and beyond this place.

You may still want to die in your sleep. But I hope that when your life on this earth has ended that you will have been privileged to be like Jesus. For I know that is what God wants for you.