

*21From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. 22And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." 23But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."*

*24Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 25For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. 26For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? 27"For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. 28Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."*

He just wanted Jesus to be safe. "God forbid it Lord! This shall never happen to you." Jesus had just said that suffering and dying awaited him in Jerusalem. "God forbid it Lord! This shall never happen to you." Peter just wanted Jesus to be safe.

Isn't that what you want?.....to be safe.

To be safe in a world where someone can learn the numbers and letters of your life – bank account – passwords – social security number – birthdate – address – and pretend to be you and spend and spend and spend until you are ruined – victim of identity theft. How much time and effort and worry I spend to guard the numbers and letters of my life because I just want to be safe.

To be safe in a world where the food you eat or even the container you store that food in can bring you harm. So some of us read labels and watch for the latest warnings and sanitize every surface because we just want to be safe.

To be safe in a world where the sky can open up and 50 inches of rain can fall in a matter of days. Places that could never flood do. And if you move from the valley to the highest hill next time it may be a funnel of wind that dips out of the clouds exploding everything in its path. So we buy insurance and pray because we just want to be safe.

Peter just wanted Jesus to be safe.

And Jesus called Peter Satan – the adversary – the tempter.

Because Peter just wanted Jesus to be safe.

What is the cost of being safe? It may mean buying a gun.

It may mean walking by a neighbor in need because I need to hang onto my money.

It may mean teaching children to have nothing to do with strangers.

It may mean keeping refugees out of our land and out of our neighborhood.

Get behind me Satan – you are not on God’s side.

Yet Peter had only wanted Jesus to be safe. Do you think that was a temptation for Jesus – to want to be safe?

Fast forward to the Garden of Gethsemane – minutes before Jesus was to be arrested. What does Jesus pray? Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Let this cup pass from me yet not what I want but what you want.” Jesus himself was praying to be safe – to not have to drink the cup of betrayal and arrest and abandonment and trial and whipping and mocking and cross carrying and crucifixion. But then he rose from prayer and faced all of these. Even though he wanted to be safe he faced arrest and abandonment and crucifixion because there is something more important than being safe.

In trying to understand Jesus and the meaning of his crucifixion Christians have said that love is what is more important than being safe - that Jesus was dying for those he loved – to save us from our sin.

At other times Christians have said that doing the Father’s will is what is more important than being safe – that doing the Father’s will is why Jesus rose to receive the kiss of Judas that evening.

Now for a moment I want you to forget all of that to think about Jesus and the cross in quite a different way. What if the Father did not send the Son into the world to die for sinners? What if the Father sent the Son into the world in the hope that love would win the day? God's Son would be the light that would enable people to really see, and the voice that would for the first time lead people to really hear, and the extended hand of God to be grasped in love? What if God really hoped that the world would receive his Son and honor his Son and love his Son and everything would be made new?

But instead after all the healing and feeding and forgiving and teaching of Jesus the world said, "We like things better without the Son of God in this world. We will be God over our lives. We will live by our vision, our words, our power. Jesus belongs on the cross and sealed in the tomb. This world is better off without God in it.

What would happen then? Would God say once and for all – "that's it, I am done with them. They had their chance – they crucified my Son."

Or would God hang in there – knowing that things would never get better with this world.

I think God had to make a decision about this world - such a tough decision that it was not until the day after the Sabbath that everything was decided.

Easter was God's decision, God's answer. God forgave the world – made Jesus alive in this world once more and in raising Jesus God was declaring that God would never give up on us.

Then God sent God's own self – God's own Spirit – Jesus' breath and life into you.

Jesus alive now in you who believe.

Jesus says, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

You follow Jesus in ways of love. You give your money, your time, yourself in loving your neighbor – you are doing the very same things that Jesus did – using what you have to make life better for others. But so very often there is a cross at the end of it all.

Instead of gratitude you receive criticism.

Instead of someone's life being transformed by your gifts of love nothing changes.

Instead of a new life springing forth there is only dying.

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

Day after day you have to make the same decision that God has made. Will you let safety be more important than love? Will you let security be more important than sharing? Will avoiding risk and pain be more important than following where Jesus leads?

Jesus learned firsthand that this world is really not going to change. But he still chooses love over safety, forgiveness over revenge, mercy over justice.

Take up your cross and follow.