

*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."*

I first read the words as a sign on the wall of the area of the school we called the dudgeon. It was the place where the wrestlers practiced – I assumed that the wrestling coach had posted the words there: No gain without pain. All my life I have been trying to find a way around those words – I would like to become a great piano player without the effort of practice - but very often I find that gaining valuable things costs me time and effort. Oh, we can dream about hitting the lottery but most of us will become far wealthier by enduring the 8-5 drudgery of everyday work. No gain without pain. Today as we consider the gospel reading I would like to borrow that saying. Jesus may not be talking about the same gain as was the wrestling coach nor about the same sort of pain, but I think the saying kind of fits.

Jesus was showing 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. This was not what Peter wanted for Jesus – maybe Peter thought that the glory God had prepared for Jesus should come without pain or loss. Peter began to rebuke Jesus saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." Peter's reaction is a natural one – I do not want those I love to suffer. But often loving another person means letting them suffer the consequences of their choices. Jesus could have avoided Jerusalem – gone on teaching and healing for many more years. But he was convinced that God wanted him to confront the religious leaders in Jerusalem – he was convinced that after he was killed God would raise him. That did not look like a good thing to Peter – Peter wanted only good things for Jesus.

Jesus 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.” Not so long before Jesus had said, “You are Peter and on this rock I will build my church. I give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” But now he calls Peter Satan, not the foundation stone but a stumbling block.

I think that during my years of serving as a pastor that I have done the most damage when I have comforted people when I should have been confronting them. It is okay that you are too busy to make a commitment, maybe next year. I understand how you can let your fear get in the way of love. You are not ready to forgive – maybe someday you will be.

Jesus did not say, “I understand how you are feeling Peter, you are afraid, that’s okay.” Jesus turned on Peter and spoke forcefully, “Get behind me Satan. You are not on God’s side.” And then he spoke to all the disciples saying, “If any want to come after me, let them deny themselves and follow me, for those who want to save their lives will lose it and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.” Jesus did not promise an easy way – a way of living that would not be costly. He promised crosses and loss for those who follow him.

Crosses and loss for you. For Jesus was not just talking to disciples and missionaries and martyrs here while all the rest of us get to sit in the stands and watch the game. You are called to follow Christ in the decisions and actions and words of your life. Will you make a commitment to Christian community? If you do it will cost you. Will you make a commitment to helping someone in need? If you do it will cost you. Will you live the forgiving and the tough love Jesus lived? If you do it will cost you. The one who loves you more than he loved even his own life wants you to suffer these costs. Not for the sake of the pain but for the sake of the gain.

Making commitments and giving yourself in love will change you. You will learn what matters in life – you will learn how God is able to strengthen and support you through many trials. You will learn a happiness that is much deeper than seeking pleasure.

I wonder how Jesus was changed by going to Jerusalem and suffering greatly, being killed, being raised. The scriptures teach that through all that he endured that forgiveness and life flowed from him. Does Jesus see the suffering of any human being, every human being in a new light after suffering so himself? Does Jesus have a special place in his heart for those who are mocked and ridiculed after the crowds mocked him? Does Jesus understand just how precious life is having been imprisoned for three days in death?

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

Sometimes a mother or a father will say something like this: “ I had it tough when I grew up, I never want my children to suffer like that.”

From time to time we have all witnessed what that way of thinking can produce – children who get everything without any effort on their part – and appreciate nothing .

Jesus does not think like that. He does not say, “That cross was so tough that I never want the ones I love to suffer like that.”

No, he says, “Take up your cross and follow me.”

Jesus who loves you with a love that endured death wants his love to be alive in you, to be shared with others through you. For Jesus knows that to love with your whole being, your whole life is to really live. Jesus wants that life for you. Forever. Amen.

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