

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"The Cost of Discipleship"

Scripture: Mark 8:27-9:9, Psalm 27:1-4

Opening Hymn: Thou whose almighty word 291

Closing Hymn: Be thou my vision 461

Children's Hymn: Lead me Jesus; I will follow 646,

Choruses: Hear I am to worship,

Rev. Steve Filyk

February 23, 2020

Transfiguration of our Lord

I grew up in the church.

From a young age I was taught about God and Jesus.

I knew that Jesus loved me, that he cared for me,  
and protected me.

My childhood understanding of Jesus is best depicted

By that story of Jesus welcoming the little children,  
Depicted on this frame.

But as I grew older

I began to sense that there was more to Jesus  
Than I had previously imagined.

Jesus, I discovered, was interested in what I was doing.

Jesus was interest in who I was becoming.

The same Jesus who welcomed the little children

talked about commitment: service and sacrifice.  
And well... I wasn't so sure about that.

PAUSE

Today we reach the midpoint of the Gospel of Mark.  
It is a crucial moment  
in the unfolding of Jesus' identity and purpose.

Up till now the road has been relatively easy.  
Most of the experiences of Jesus and the disciples  
have been very positive.

God's power has been at work in Jesus' ministry.  
Jesus has been performing miracles, driving out demons,  
And healing all sorts of people.

All the while his fame has been growing.

Taking a break from his Galilean ministry,  
Jesus heads to the villages around Caesarea Philippi  
where he checks in with his disciples.

He asks them what others are saying about him.  
And then he asks them what **they** think of him.

Peter proclaims: "You are the Messiah."

This is a climactic moment.  
The disciples seem to be getting it.

But when Jesus starts teaching them  
What his Messiahship will entail—

Suffering and rejection,  
Death and resurrection—

his words draw a blank stare.

Suffering doesn't square with the power they've seen at work in Jesus.  
Rejection doesn't fit their expectations of any Messiah.

The Messiah was supposed to scare away the Romans,  
restore the Davidic monarchy,  
Usher in a new era of peace and prosperity.

And for close associates like Peter,  
maybe throw in a high government position  
or a lucrative fishing contract.

But Jesus sounds less like an aspiring reformer  
and more like a wild doomsday prophet.

Peter takes Jesus aside and tries to talk sense to him.  
But Jesus rejects this.

Despite getting full marks for that earlier confessional statement:  
"You are the Messiah"  
Peter gets an "F" for understanding  
what Messiah actually means.

But Jesus knows that there is no glory without suffering.  
Jesus knows that following God's purposes  
Will lead to conflict with the authorities.  
Jesus knows that following God's purposes is the only way  
To defeat sin, death and the Devil.

Jesus knows that the road ahead will be marked by suffering,  
Both for him and for all who follow after him.

And so Jesus gives his disciples  
an opportunity to reconsider their commitment.

He tells them plainly: "Whoever wants to be my disciple  
must deny themselves  
And take up their cross  
And follow me."<sup>i</sup>

To follow means to accept Jesus lead.  
To take up a cross mean to volunteer for costly redemptive work.<sup>ii</sup>  
To deny yourself, means to "give up...  
[a] preoccupation with self  
In order to discover the true self in Christ."<sup>iii</sup>

The invitation to follow,  
first extended to Peter and three others beside a sunny sea,  
is now redefined in the shadow of a cross.<sup>iv</sup>  
[motion to the sanctuary cross]

As a young person

I began to see that the Jesus who loved me

Also wanted something from me...

Something I wasn't sure I was prepared to give.

So what do you think?

Is Jesus asking too much?

The truth is that ambitious pursuits

demand a wholehearted commitment.

What to be a professional athlete?

You will need to watch what you eat,

Even give up food that you love.

Tom Brady, one of the greatest football players to ever live

"rarely drinks alcohol or has any type of dessert.

He also does not drink coffee or tea,

but sometimes will drink a cup of bone broth."

Yummy... bone broth.

Want to establish a new business?

You will need to sacrifice your leisure time.

"One survey from New York Enterprise Report

found that small business owners

work twice as much as regular employees.

[The survey] found that 33% of small business owners reported working more than 50 hours per week, and 25% said they work more than 60 hours a week.”<sup>vi</sup>

And how about following Jesus?

You will need to deny self,  
Make his work your priority,  
Submit to the Lord’s direction.

Jesus is telling his disciples that following him as a real commitment.  
But he also says it is worthwhile.

In terms of his own journey, death is followed by resurrection:  
After three days he will rise again.

As for his follower, he promises his disciples  
that those who lose themselves in his service,  
Will discover life.

At our last Alpha event this past Tuesday,  
our video introduced us to a man named Scott Harrison.

“After ditching his Christian faith at 18 years of age,  
Harrison "had been working at selfishness" for ten years,  
selling \$350 bottles of vodka,  
promoting nightclubs and fashion events,  
and hanging out with beautiful people [in NYC]...

He should have been happy...  
but he was instead confronted  
with how arrogant and selfish he had become.

Realizing he was spiritually bankrupt,  
Harrison began reading *The Pursuit of God*, by A.W. Tozer,  
and praying...

[He] was "drinking heavily and partying at night,  
but praying by day."

It wasn't until six months later that he decided to leave New York  
and dedicate a year of his life in service to God and the poor.

He volunteered to serve as a photojournalist with Mercy Ships...  
The ship took him to Liberia where he faced a poverty  
and human suffering that he had thought unimaginable.

There was no public electricity, no running water,  
no sewage, and no mail.

Families had to walk miles to collect water  
– and dirty water at that –  
from ponds and puddles.”<sup>vii</sup>

Upon returning to NYC... having seen the effects of dirty water firsthand,  
Scott turned his full attention to the global water crisis  
and the (then) 1.1 billion people  
living without access to clean water.

He established a small core team in a tiny Manhattan apartment  
and created charity: water...

Thirteen years later,  
with the help of more than 1 million supporters worldwide,  
charity: water has raised \$450 million  
and funded over 51,000 water projects in 28 countries.<sup>viii</sup>

This has involved a lot of work and commitment.  
But do you think that Scott is missing his earlier life?  
A life devoted to self?

Theologian John Webster notes,  
that the *active* death on behalf of his followers  
“is [in fact] the abandonment  
of what has already been disqualified, judged and set aside  
by the call of Jesus to new life.

What the disciples leaves and loses  
is not the life-giving order of created existence,  
but [all its disorder]...”<sup>ix</sup>

Like the caterpillar dying to a lower type of existence,  
the follower of Jesus is called to leave what is inferior  
to discover what is superior.

And for those who have spread their wings,  
there is no looking back.

Amen.

<sup>i</sup> Mark 8:34 NIV

<sup>ii</sup> See Lamar Williamson Jr. *Mark* 154

<sup>iii</sup> Raymond Bailey “Mark 8:31-38” *The Lectionary Commentary: the Gospels* 238

<sup>iv</sup> Lamar Williamson Jr. *Mark* 154

<sup>v</sup> Andrew Merle “The Eating Habits Of The Best Athletes In The World” December 16, 2018 [medium.com/@andrewmerle/the-eating-habits-of-the-best-athletes-in-the-world-20fa1462ea1](https://medium.com/@andrewmerle/the-eating-habits-of-the-best-athletes-in-the-world-20fa1462ea1)

<sup>vi</sup> Brian Sutter “How Hard Small Business Owners Work” April 15, 2019 <https://www.score.org/blog/how-hard-small-business-owners-work>

<sup>vii</sup> Lillian Kwon “New Yorker Trades Lush Life for Water Wells” September 2, 2009 [www.christianpost.com/news/new-yorker-trades-lush-life-for-dirty-water.html](http://www.christianpost.com/news/new-yorker-trades-lush-life-for-dirty-water.html)

<sup>viii</sup> “Meet the Founder” <https://www.charitywater.org/about/scott-harrison-story/>

<sup>ix</sup> John Webster “Discipleship and Calling” *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 16,17