

## I Have Heard Enough

Texts: Proverbs 1:20-33

James 3:1-12 (Series B, 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost) Wisdom 7:26-8:1

Mark 8:27-38

Prayer:

An elderly woman who had hearing problems. Reluctantly, she gave in to suggestions from family members that she see an ear specialist ... After the doctor had made a methodical examination of the woman's ears, he said to her, "You have a condition which can be corrected by minor surgery.

I suggest we do it as soon as possible. This will give us our best chance to correct your hearing problem." To which she replied forcefully, "There will be no operation, thank you. I don't want to correct my hearing problem. I'm eighty-nine years old, and *I've heard enough!*"

*"I've heard enough"* feeling is no stranger to any of us. Many of us endure it daily at six-o'clock or ten-o'clock "News" time.

- ❖ Reports of murder and other violent crimes -- *We've heard enough!*
- ❖ Reports of political corruption in high places -- *We've heard enough!*
- ❖ Reports of armed conflict between nations and people -- *We've heard enough!*
- ❖ Reports of unfair and dishonest business practice -- *We've heard enough!*

All of which clearly indicates that the New Testament Good News report of a Loving God's plan for the reconciliation of all mankind in His Kingdom of Love is not being heard nearly enough. The world, it seems, has a hearing problem.

Jesus employed many different ways of communicating the Good News of God's Love to His disciples. Through prayer, through the Scriptures, through ordinary conversation, and through parables.

And, as we read in today's Gospel Lesson, it is not easy to speak about the cross, some people react to the Cross of Jesus Christ in a negative fashion. They recognize the face of suffering and of death and so, they avoid all the cross talk.

Most people, in other words, react to the cross like the Apostle Peter reacted to Jesus when he spoke for the first time to the disciples about what was going to happen to him.

Jesus began to teach his disciples saying: "*the son of man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.*" "What is this" - Peter thought. "A good man - an innocent man - a man of God - a man who is my friend - must suffer and then be killed!" Peter felt that this was wrong!

He took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him. Don't talk this way Jesus - it's wrong! No one who is good should have to suffer, bad things shouldn't happen to good people! God rewards the righteous and punishes sinners, right! You are the messiah - the promised saviour of Israel, for Pete sake! you are the one we all look up to.

You shouldn't have to suffer, you shouldn't be rejected and killed! But Jesus, looked at Peter and the other disciples and then he rebuked Peter, saying to him. You are not thinking like God, you are in fact speaking like Satan would speak - trying to get me to avoid the purpose I was born.

Jesus turns back to the disciples and to the people assembled around him and says: If anyone of you would come after me, they must deny themselves and take up their crosses and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.

We do know that the early church took these words of our Lord very seriously - so much so that it was believed from the very beginning - from the time Stephen was stoned - that if a person was killed because they were spreading the gospel of Jesus that they were blessed.

But what about us today? What do Jesus' words: "If anyone would come after me, they must deny themselves and take up their crosses and follow me", really mean for us who want to be his followers? I believe that it is fair to say that most of us are not called upon to suffer and die for what we do in Christ's name today.

While in some parts of the world people are being killed on daily basis because of their faith in Christ - because of their belief in the liberating word of God, most of us are not called upon to make this sacrifice.

So, what does denying ourselves and taking up our crosses and following Jesus entail for us? Well - it involves primarily *how* and *why* we make our daily choices. It involves whether or not we choose things on the basis of what is convenient and easy and self-serving or on the basis of what is *right* and *good* and *loving*.

To take up one's cross here means to forget one's own righteousness and goodness, and to do what Christ would have done, to do what he did on the way to the cross, and take into one's arms all the lost and lonely little ones and to bless them.

Simply put: We must choose either to follow Christ's example or not: - the Christ who was rejected because he was good to *prostitutes* and *tax collectors*, and other *sinners* and *outcasts*, to speak for those who can't speak for themselves, well that is often much harder.

It is easy to choose to save one's own skin, all we have to do is go with the flow. But the way of the cross is - by and large much harder - for it is a way that contradicts the easy way of the world, a way that often earns us the hatred of those who are evil, and brings hostility of those who do not like the light to shine upon their acts.

The choice of deny oneself is difficult because our self is reluctant to die -- our self is reluctant to allow God to work in us and through us -- our self is reluctant to trust that God can and will work a wonderful work in us when we follow in his path.

On one occasion Jesus assembled his disciples and asked them one simple question "*Who do people say that I am?*" Their answers varied exactly like what most people would have said today: some said *John the Baptist, Elijah, the prophets and so forth*. Now he directed the question to them personally: "*But who do you say that I am?*"

There was silence for a while and Peter broke the stillness with his outstanding declaration: *"You are the Messiah"* The Gospel lesson poses the same question to each and every one of us here this morning: "But who do **you** say that I am" ..... What is your answer?

To me Faith is the biblical response to the truth, and believing the truth to me is a choice based on an object. Faith is something I decide to do, not something I feel like doing. Believing the truth doesn't make it true; it's true, so I believe it. I can't create reality; I can only respond to reality.

*"But who do you say that I am?"* is a very interesting question, I find. During the life of Jesus in the land Palestine, there were prominent religious leaders who claimed to be messengers of God. Jesus wasn't the only prophet walking the dusty roads and back allies of Palestine calling people to repentance, there were many others (Acts 5:33). Before him and after his death.

But the question that haunts me is: how come, among all these groups, that flourished for years and claimed to have the truth, kind of died off, but Jesus message has survived for the past 2000 years and still growing. As I speak Christianity is still the fastest growing religion in the world. May be there is something true and unique about this historical Jesus.

*"Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him"* (Hebrews 11:6). Another point of interest for me is *Faith* must have an *object*. It's not the idea that I merely "believe" that counts; it's what or who I believe in that counts.

Everybody believes in something, and everybody walks by faith according to what he or she believes in. But if what I believe isn't true, then how I live won't be right either. Thus, *"Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ"* (Romans 10:17).

My faith is only as good as my knowledge of the *object* of my faith. If I have little or no knowledge of God and His Word, it will reflect on how I view God in my daily interaction with my environment.

Any attempt to live by faith beyond what I absolutely know to be true is presumption. If I only believe what I feel, I will be led through life by one emotional impulse after another. The path of truth begins with the truth of God's Word, I think.

God will always stay true to Himself and keep His Word and His covenants with humankind. It is not my place to determine what is true or try to persuade God to capitulate to my will. He is the truth. We are to ask according to His will and desire his will above all else.

This is the meaning of the question, "*But who do you say that I am?*" this is the cross that most of us are called to carry each and every day. This is, for most of us, what is involved in denying oneself and choosing to follow the master:

To be vulnerable as Jesus was, to give up our own opinions, our own selves, and, if need be, our friends, for the sake of caring for the children - both young and old - that others judge. Do you see how this cross talk about denying oneself and picking up the cross and following Jesus works?

It is not even about going from door to door telling people about Jesus and asking them if they are saved. No, it's about being the kind of witness to the faith who strives to forget his or her opinion of who is bad and who is good, and instead strives to treat all people with love, its about being the kind of witness who risks the disapproval of his or her friends because he or she has decided to follow Jesus.

But the marvel of it all is this - just as Jesus received a new and glorious life on account of his faithfulness, just as the Christians who were burned at the stake and fed to the lions in the Coliseum are seated at Christ's right hand, so those who forget themselves in the little ways I have described - those who pick up the cross of Christ and follow in his path - receive a new and glorious life, one in which the Son of Man is not ashamed of them - but rather shines brightly through them.

Thanks be to Christ - who denied himself, and picked up his cross, and followed in the path of God. And we are not going to say "*I Have Heard Enough*" but together with the apostle Peter say:

"Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." Amen.

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