

### Reckless Love

Grace and peace to you Beloved of God, in the name of the Creator, the Christ, and the Spirit One.

Our text for this morning is one of those that can cause our knees to quake, can make all our anxieties rise to the surface. We feel for our friend and our brother Peter, who upon hearing that his friend and his teacher and his savior must undergo suffering and die, seeks to protect him, to prevent this future from taking place. What a completely relatable reaction from Peter. After all, aren't we all seeking to avoid suffering in our own lives, and to prevent it as we can in the lives of others? Especially those we love.

It's this complete relatability, which Peter so often embodies for us, that makes Jesus' words so painful, seemingly so harsh. He calls his friend and pupil Satan – the deceiver, the liar, the Evil One. My first instinct is to want to step in, to put an arm around Peter, to tell Jesus to chill out and give a Peter break. He loves you Lord, can't you see that?

Following his rebuke of Peter, Jesus turns to his disciples and to the crowd, making it clear that this rebuke is not for Peter alone, but for each of us. He says, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." Throughout the ages, preachers, teachers, and theologians have attempted to spiritualize this radical call to self-denial. Taking up our cross is simply about doing those things that align with good Christian charity, or maybe suffering the dismissal by a secular culture that finds religion silly. But for the community that Mark is writing to the cross cannot, and will not, be separated from the very real horror, shame, and terror of public execution. Jesus is not simply saying that to follow him will sometimes be inconvenient, or uncomfortable. Rather, Jesus is telling his disciples and us 2,000 years later, that to follow the Human One, Jesus the Christ, is dangerous, it's deadly, it's downright reckless.

This is a call that terrifies me. And it reminds me of those well-worn words of our brother Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "When Christ calls a person, he bids them come and die". What am I to do with this call? Is Jesus calling for the church to fulfill some kind of Jonestown-esque suicide mission? Is he suggesting that the world will know the church by how often and how harshly we are tormented and tortured?

The problem we have, especially today, is that we read this text prescriptively, rather than descriptively. We continue to hear Christ's words in the language of the Law. In Lutheran theology, we say the Law convicts and directs. It shows us where we have failed and guides us towards how we ought to act. So, when we hear Jesus telling us to take up our cross, we hear him directing us and convicting our inaction. Well, I didn't suffer and die today, so I must not be a very good disciple. While there may be some clear directing and convicting on the part of Jesus' call to take up the cross, we are called to enter into solidarity with our neighbors, with those who are suffering, and to set aside our own self-interest for that of others, though that is there, I hear much more clearly, especially in light of the entire Gospel message, the language of inevitability. Yes, following Jesus is dangerous, deadly, and reckless, but only because Jesus himself has gone before us and claimed each of us through his reckless love.

This is the Gospel, that Word that does not convict nor direct, but comforts and liberates. It sets us free from the fears and the terrors that bind us, that prevent us from standing alongside our neighbors, from taking up our cross.

In a text like the one today it can be difficult to hear that comfort, that liberation, but I suggest that it is in fact in that rebuke of Peter, that stern, even harsh declaration that Peter has set his mind on human things and not divine things. That rebuke when I hear it ringing in my own ears tells me to set aside those fears and those terrors and those anxieties that would keep me grounded and rooted in the things of this world that are fleeting and incomplete. My need to be perfect, my need to be honored and respected, my need to be seen by others as good, or my need to avoid rejection, humiliation, and suffering. In this rebuke, Jesus reminds Peter, the disciples, and us that he goes before us and enlivens us with his Spirit and embodies us with his reckless love. When we are grounded in this reckless love of Jesus we will be drawn inevitably into the deep messiness and brokenness of this world to be an abiding, provoking, and resisting force, and this is dangerous.

Reckless love cares for the neighbor so fully, so completely, that we give up what is ours to make it theirs. Reckless love offers mercy and forgiveness and fellowship to the sinner burdened by guilt and shame, not because of what they have done, but because of what Christ has already done for us. Reckless love has no time for the fear of rejection, humiliation, and suffering because in Christ we have found the freedom and the courage to serve, to pray, to worship with our whole lives, leaving nothing out.

The truth is dear friends, we can not of our own volition lift high that cross, to practice this reckless love. It is only in Christ and in that deep knowing and awareness of God's reckless love for us and for all creation that we are able to take up our cross, because in the words of the Apostle Paul it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.

This reckless love that grips us and animates us in our baptism, in faith, is what Henri Nouwen had in mind when he said:

“You will discover that the more love you can take in and hold on to, the less fearful you will become...The more you come to know yourself – spirit, mind, and body – as truly loved, the freer you will be to proclaim the good news. That is the freedom of the children of God.”

Friends, we have many fears in this life, but in Christ we have been set loose by reckless love to fear no more, to preach the Gospel, and to take up the cross – trusting that it is Christ in us doing the heavy lifting leading us, often dragging us kicking and screaming, towards a life of reckless love. Thanks be to God.