



Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

August 30, 2020

* *Please stand if you are able*

Prelude

Gathering

Welcome and Lighting the Christ Candle

Acolyte: May the Holy Spirit unite us in worship, point us toward Jesus Christ, and inspire us to love mercy, do justice, and walk humbly with God. Come, let us worship God.

* Liturgist: Give praise to the Lord, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done.

All: Sing of him, sing his praises; tell of all his wonderful acts. Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.

Liturgist: Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always.
Psalm 105: 1-4

All Singing: 581 “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee”

Minister: To God’s people gathered in hope: Grace to you, mercy and peace, from God our Creator and Christ our Redeemer, through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Passing the Peace at a Distance

Reconciliation

Liturgist: Remember the wonders the Lord has done, his miracles and the judgements he has pronounced. He is the Lord God; his judgements are in all the earth.

All: He remembers his covenant forever, the promises he made, the covenant he made with Abraham, the oath he swore to Isaac, the decree he confirmed to Jacob – an everlasting covenant. *Psalm 105: 5-8 adapted*

Liturgist: In that great confidence hear us as we pray:

All: Forgive us our sins, O Lord. Forgive us the sins of our youth and the sins of our age, the sins of our soul and the sins of our body, our secret and our whispering sins, our presumptuous and our careless sins, the sins we have done to please ourselves and those we have done to please others. Forgive us the sins that we know, and the sins that we know not; forgive them all because of your great mercy. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Liturgist: Brothers and sisters, there is no now condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the sinful nature God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful humanity to be a sin offering.

Romans 8: 1-3 adapted

* **All Singing: 682 “Before the Throne of God”**

Liturgist: Therefore, love with sincerity. Hate what is evil and cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

All: Let us bless and not curse those who persecute us. Let us rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn.

Liturgist: Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with all people. Do not think you are superior.

All: Let us not repay evil for evil, being careful to do what’s right in the eyes of everyone. As far as it depends on us, let us live at peace with everyone.

Romans 12: 9-18 adapted

Proclamation

All Singing: 899 “Seek Ye First”

Scripture: Matthew 16: 21-28

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!”

Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet

forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.

"Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

Minister: The Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Sermon: What God Carries

* **All Singing: 928 "Lord Whose Love in Humble Service"**
Singing verses 1, 3 and 4

Dedication

Prayer (9:00 AM)

Ordination of Moises Pacheco as Commissioned Pastor (10:15 AM)

* **All Singing: 956 "To God Be the Glory"**

Benediction

Praying with Elders – If you have a concern or joy that you'd like to talk or pray about with an Elder, one or two will be available in the shade near the sanctuary entrance following the service.

Worship Leaders

Pianist/Vocalist: Erin Pacheco
Guitar/Mandolin: Jeremy Hulford
Percussion: Clay Carlson
Sound Engineer: Schuyler Roozeboom
Minister: Roger Nelson

9:00 AM Service

Acolyte: VanderWeele
Liturgist: Barb Lavery
Prayer: Wally Ottenhoff
Vocalist: Marjie Coleman

10:15 AM Service

Acolyte: Cooper Westerveld
Liturgist: Van Wyngarden

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Text: Matthew 16: 21-28
Title: What God Carries
Date: 08.30.20
Roger Allen Nelson

I went to my 25 year seminary class reunion.
The luncheon was pleasant; the conversation was painful.

After chicken-salad croissants we were asked to share a snapshot of what we'd been doing for 25 years. The first alum spoke in a hushed whisper. You had to inch forward and bear down in order to hear him speak. He said he'd been a pastor in upstate New York, recently retired, on permanent disability and suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. He'd served in Vietnam; he'd done very, very bad things.

We all held our breath.

He said maybe we didn't know that he'd been in Vietnam, he didn't talk about it while in seminary, he was working with a therapist, there was a book about his platoon, maybe this was an odd occasion to come out about his past.

“We went into villages and killed everything....”

I knew him to be a quiet second career seminarian who'd been a truck driver in northwest Iowa. I had no idea what to do or say. “I serve a lovely little church in the southwest suburbs of Chicago,” seemed like a feeble follow up. But...

But, I was reminded that we don't always know one another.
We don't know the burdens people shoulder.
We don't know the weight that others carry.

The Things They Carried is a kind of memoir by Tim O'Brien about fellow ground soldiers in Vietnam. He puts it this way:

They carried all the emotional baggage of men who might die. Grief, terror, love, longing – these were intangibles, but the intangibles had their own mass and specific gravity, they had tangible weight.

Dear friends, what are you carrying this morning?
What are you carrying that haunts you or helps you?
What are you carrying that inspires and draws you forward?
What are you carrying that weighs you down?
What are you carrying that has a tangible weight?

Jesus says that his disciples will pick up and carry a cross.

Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

Now. The disciples of Jesus knew the cross to be a brutal tool of execution used by the empire. It was an apparatus of terror, humiliation and death. And, it had a specific weight....

According to some historians a whole cross may have weighed well over 300 pounds, but the crossbeam would weigh only 75 to 125 pounds. Therefore, the condemned would have the beam strapped or nailed to their shoulders and then be forced to carry it to the place of execution. There it would be hoisted up and affixed to a pole that was already planted in the ground. Then the legs of the crucified would often be broken and the bodies were usually left hanging to be ravaged by the elements.

Maybe Clarence Jordan's paraphrase is closer to the spirit of what Jesus said,
If a man wants to walk my way, he must abandon self, accept his lynching, and share my life.

So, when Jesus tells his followers that he's headed toward suffering and death it is no wonder that Peter pulls Jesus aside to tell him to tone it down and stick with the good news. In fact, Peter's response can be translated:

God forbid Lord; this will never happen to you.

The one that Peter had just pronounced "the Christ, the Son of the Living God" could never be rejected and killed – and especially crucified. It was unthinkable, unbearable, impossible, inconceivable.

And yet, when God expressed his will in this world he chose the cross.
He didn't choose political movement, military triumph, or spiritual message; he chose a brutal death at the hands of the state. And, then he calls us to follow.

Gulp....

I guess in the economy of God there is an inevitability to the cross. As the theological formula has it: The justice of God can't ignore sin. The mercy of God can't ignore the sinner. So, God's judgement and God's love meet in the cross.

But, the cross is also evidence that God doesn't skirt, shrug off, plead ignorance, or feign impotence; rather God hears, identifies with, and enters into human suffering. God knows, shares, and finds his place among those denied justice, denied power, denied a voice. God denies self. The cross is what God carries.

And that, dear friends, is outlandish! A scandal, a stumbling stone, a mystery so profound that Peter in his befuddlement goes from being called a rock to being called Satan.

However, what is equally stupefying is the admonition to take up a cross and follow. How would we carry what God carries? How would we take up our cross and follow?

Certainly, it must mean more than working with someone who annoys us, or living with some ailment, or suffering through the trials and tribulations of 2020. And, certainly it doesn't mean that our cross-bearing has some salvific value. We can't carry what God carries.

So, how then do we carry our crosses?
How do we pick our cross and follow Christ?

Tom Long answers this way:

Cross bearers forfeit the game of power before the first inning; they are never selected as "Most Likely to Succeed." Cross bearers are dropouts in the school of self-promotion. They do not pick up their crosses as means of personal fulfillment, career advancement, or self-expression; rather they deny themselves and pick up their crosses, like their Lord, because of the needs of other people

In that light, I know many of you to be cross bearers:

Parents are cross bearers for children, children are cross bearers for aging parents, healthy marriages have a measure of cross bearing, friends can carry the crosses of friends, nurses can carry crosses, teachers can carry crosses. (Students should carry books....)

Whenever we stretch beyond comfort, let go of self for the sake of the other, enter into and share in the suffering of others we find there some life, some meaning, and some abundance.

In the words of Barbara Brown Taylor:

To be where God is – to follow Jesus – means going beyond the limits of our own comfort and safety. It means receiving our lives as gifts instead of guarding them as possessions. It means sharing the life we have been given instead of bottling it for own consumption. It means giving up the notion that we build dams to contain the bright streams of our lives and instead, letting them go, letting them swell our banks and spill our wealth until they carry us down to where they run, full and growing fuller, into the wide and glittering sea.

Beautiful, but....

But, is that what Jesus meant?

Is there something more?

I don't know what you're carrying.

I know that some of you carry back breaking burdens, some carry long painful pasts, some shoulder depression like a lead coat, and some carry loneliness, grief, and anxiety. I know that the intangibles have a tangible weight. To carry more seems like a big ask.

And yet, what often gets lost in how we hear this passage, is that Jesus says his disciples will deny self and then lug their cross along after Jesus. So, part of cross bearing is the denial of self.

Or maybe better said, discipleship involves setting aside our notions of self, whatever they are: self-loathing, self-importance, self-promoting, self-serving, self-ish, self-satisfying, self-determining....

Dear friends, could it be that to deny self is to set aside the lies and delusions that we have about ourselves? To not give power to those self-conceptions? To deny what world and culture and sometimes family history tells us about ourselves? And instead, see ourselves first as God in Christ sees us. To see ourselves first through the cross:

You are loved and accepted by God in Christ.

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Even one carrying the horrors of war.

And as that is true, as we can deny distorted notions of self, then we are better able to carry the cross of love and forgiveness and mercy in service of God and neighbor. As we deny fabricated and false ideas of self we are free to live into what Richard Rohr calls our “vocation to share the fate of God for the life of the world.” We are free to carry our crosses because ultimately God’s way and will in this world is true and to be trusted.

In the words of Paul:

For God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

May that be what we carry.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.