

# Sermons at First Church

**A Ministry of the Word**

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**Clarksburg, WV**

**Mark 8:31-38**

*Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.*

(Mark 8:31 N.R.S.V.)

## The Way of the Cross

I am a child of God. I believe in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. And I believe he has the power to change my life and your life.

When I came back from Air Force in 1979, I considered myself quite independent. I had been out on my own for a while. Yet I still wanted my Mom to come with me when I drove to Fairmont to register for college. She was a wonderful person, my Mom. It still breaks my heart that she died the following spring. I was not ready to let her go. She was only 44 years old. I missed her every day, but especially on the important dates when I know that she would have been cheering for me. I missed her at my graduation from college and seminary. I missed her when I got married. I missed her when our children were born. I still miss her to this day.

Those of us who have lost loved ones can sympathize with what Peter was going through in our text from Mark. Jesus has just announced that he was about to suffer and die. Peter was not ready to let him go. Peter had only known the Master for about three years. There were all kinds of challenges and opportunities yet to come that he wanted to share with Jesus. He was not ready to let him go.

Peter was not ready for Jesus to die. He was not ready to let him go. Peter, being Peter, opened his big mouth and rebuked Jesus. Jesus in turn rebuked Peter. He said this temptation for him to avoid his death was nothing less than a temptation from Satan. Jesus went on to say that he must die. Not only was he going to die, but he must die.

Every year during the season of Lent we are confronted with the question of why Jesus had to die. The question has many answers. Today I want to touch on three of them.

First, Jesus died to show us the depth of God's love and commitment to us. When bad things happen in our lives, we are tempted to think that God has abandoned us. In the midst of trouble we often feel so alone and so overwhelmed. In his willingness to die on the cross for us, Jesus demonstrated once and for all the depth of God's love for us. There is nothing that God will not

do, in order to save us. We may not know why we have to go through some particular trouble, but the question about whether God loves us or not, is off the table. God answered that question 2000 years ago. Whatever you may be going through today, rest assured that God's love is with you and will continue to support you come what may.

Second, Jesus died to show us the seriousness of sin. Sin is anything that comes between us and God. Sin is anything that keeps us from loving and serving God with all of our heart, with all of our mind, with all of our soul, with all of our strength.

It is part of the modern mind set to wink at sin, to say that sin is not really all that bad or dangerous. "So I sin," people say, "God will forgive me. God is in the business of forgiving." Ted Turner once said words to the effect: "So what if I have slept with a few women, I don't think God is going to throw me into hell for that."

Jesus died so that we would know that sin is deadly, destructive, and dangerous. God takes sin seriously and so should we. Sin steals our joy. Sin ruins our health. Sin hurts the very people who love us the most. Sin is a killer disguised in fine clothing.

The Apostle Paul talks about the death of Christ as a ransom that bought us from slavery to sin. Why? He asks, "Would we ever want to ignore what Christ has done and sell ourselves back into slavery?"

Let me move on to the third reason that Jesus had to die. Jesus refused to ask us to do something that he would not do himself. Jesus calls us to live a life of love and service. The Christian life is undergirded with joy and love. Yet, at the same time, it is a life filled with difficult challenges that might demand our all, even to the point of giving up our lives.

Many of the early Christians were killed for their faith in Christ. Even today in parts of the world, Christians are still persecuted and killed for their faith. In our text for today Jesus says, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?" (Vss. 34-37)

We are fortunate to live in a country where it is rare for someone to suffer death for their faith. Yet, even in this country you can't be faithful to Christ without sacrifice and pain.

I was reading an interesting story about a chef in one of Manhattan's famous restaurants. The restaurant is named, The Spotted Pig. The name of the chef is April Bloomfield. April claims that when she was interviewed for the position, the owners of The Spotted Pig did not ask her to cook for them. Instead they asked to see her arms.

Co-owner Mario Batali, a famous chef in his own right, hired Bloomfield the minute he saw her scars. Like many committed chefs, Bloomfield's arms are crisscrossed with scars, healed burns,

that she received when reaching into an oven, or stirring a pot, or rearranging things on a stove. One author suggests that chefs who bear no scars are not passionate about their craft. The scars show that the chef is so focused on the food and so committed to excellence that she is willing to suffer for her work. (Dynamic Preaching/ January-March 2015, pg. 56)

Those who are passionate about following Christ will also have scars - at least spiritual scars. The Christian life is a call to the way of the cross. It involves a willingness to sacrifice and endure hardship for the sake of Christ.

Committed Christians are hard to stop. I remember a friend telling about one of his dogs, a beagle mix. The dog had been digging in his wife's flowerbeds. So Keith decided to put a low electric fence around the flower garden. Much to his surprise the fence did not work. The dog would get down as low as he could and crawl under the wire. The wire would be snapping and spitting on his back, but the dog would just growl, grit his teeth and keep crawling.

Christians should be at least that passionate about following Christ. Every area of life should show our commitment. Our values ought to reflect our faith. Our budget ought to reflect our faith. How we raise our children ought to reflect our faith.

What would you be willing to give up in order to follow Jesus?

Dr. Mickey Anders gives an amusing example of the extremes that people will go to for far less serious causes. He tells about a question that appeared on a website called, "The Remy Report." The question asked, "If the 'god of all things baseball' said to you, 'I will let the Red Sox win the World Series this year depending on what you are willing to do in return,' how far would you be willing to go to bring the World Series to Boston?"

There were thousands of responses. Here are a few:

Doug said, "I would be willing to use the same dental floss for three weeks straight."

Suzanne said, "I would be willing to hand wash all the team's dirt socks for the rest of my life."

Sami said, "I would be willing to listen to 'Rhinestone Cowboy' on a loop until my ears bleed."

Joseph said, "I would be willing to give up my wife of 19 years . . ." I hope his wife didn't hear that one!

Chris said, "I would be willing to do anything, I'd sell my soul if I had to."  
(Dynamic Preaching/Jan-Mar. 2015, pg. 57)

All joking aside, what you be willing to do in order to follow Christ?

Someone has pointed out that the reason so many people hold the Armed Forces of our country in such high esteem is that we know that the men and women who volunteer for service are willing to pay the ultimate price. Veterans are people, who at some point in their lives, wrote a blank check made payable to the United States of America for an amount up to and including their life. What if the world knew that the followers of Jesus had that same level of commitment?

Jesus is not asking anything of us that he was not willing to do himself. He came to live and die among people - to suffer as we suffer - to celebrate as we celebrate. He came to show that we have nothing to fear in life or in death.

Jesus said, "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?"

Words to live by. As the music begins to play, let us think and pray on this.

Amen.