

Isaiah 50:4-9a  
Psalm 116:1-9  
James 3:1-12  
Mark 8:27-38

## Sermon September 12<sup>th</sup> 2021

### *Jesus Leads Us*

Up until this point in our gospel this morning, Jesus' ministry is going well. Jesus is healing the sick. Exorcising demons out of people. Raising the dead. Feeding multitudes. Preaching good news to the poor. Reconnecting marginalized people to their communities. Jesus is on fire as his message spreads across the region of Galilee, and into Gentile territories.

Now, the crowds are still trying to figure out who Jesus is, as we can tell by what they are saying to the disciples about Jesus. However, the disciples are starting to catch on. Peter their spoke's person tells Jesus who the disciples think he is. The Messiah. Jesus goes on to affirm Peter's words.

At this moment, everything looks good. Yes. Jesus does encounter some push back from the religious authorities. And the crowds are still a little confused to who Jesus is. That being said, more and more people are flocking to Jesus (**Image**). Experiencing God's healing and love through Jesus' words and actions. And the disciples who he is training to take over for him when he dies are finally getting it. Everything looks good.

Then something changes in Jesus' tone. Jesus' message comes with a dose of reality. The Roman Empire still rules. The religious structures in place still dictate who is in, and who is out. People are still suffering.

The sunny days of Jesus's miracles and words of wisdom will experience some stormy weather, as his challenges towards the authorities become bolder. There will be hard times ahead as Jesus pushes forward with this movement. In fact, Jesus will have to suffer and die for this movement.

Because, if Jesus is going to be an impactful voice for the marginalized, the oppressed, Jesus will inevitably have to face a violent reaction from the Empire, and all those who are accountable to this Empire. This is the cost of standing up for those who the Empire rejects. Crucifixion is the sentence for those who speak out against the Empire (**Image**).

If Jesus is going to be able to reconcile us with God, Jesus is going to have to challenge that force within us that separates us from God. That force that tells us that we don't need God. That force that tells us that God is more of a threat than a help.

That force that sometimes triggers within ourselves a violent reaction when our autonomy, our power is threatened.

Jesus needs to challenge this force within us, so we can reconnect with that need to depend on God's wisdom and grace for life. So, when we look towards the cross, we see a God who suffers with us. Not a God who threatens us. We see a God who heals us. Not a God who hurts us. We see a God who conquers death. Not a God who succumbs to the powers of this world.

Whether we like it or not, this is the path the Messiah will need to walk to liberate God's people from sin and death. This is the path the Messiah will need to walk to disarm the Empire from its biggest weapon. The cross **(Image)**.

Peter can't believe what he is hearing. Who would want to sign up for this movement? To watch their leader suffer and die? No where in what Peter has learned about the Messiah leads him to believe that the Messiah will need to go through something as traumatic as Jesus is talking about.

So, in response to the outrageous things Jesus is saying, Peter tries to rebuke Jesus. Peter tries to silence Jesus.

In response to Peter's rebuke, Jesus tells him not to be a temptation. Jesus will not let his close relationship with Peter get in the way of what he needs to do to set us free from sin, death, and the Empire.

Now maybe after having some time to reflect on Jesus' inevitable fate, people will get used to the idea of Jesus dying if it means saving the masses.

But, this isn't where Jesus's message stops. Jesus goes on to tell all who are following him that they too will need to take up their crosses **(Image)**. They too will need to suffer, and in some cases, die to keep this movement going.

To be a disciple. To follow Jesus isn't just about being witnesses of all the good God is doing in the world. To be a disciple. To follow Jesus isn't just about feeling comfortable and safe inside the walls of a worship space **(Image)**. Sometimes being a disciple is about walking down a hard path that may lead to suffering, and even death.

Sometimes we are called to say things that challenge the powers and authorities that are oppressing life within God's creation. Sometimes we are called to stand with the marginalized risking persecution from these authorities, and sometimes even persecution from our neighbours **(Image)**. Sometimes we are called to give a lot of ourselves to support a ministry. Sometimes we are called to reach out and help people in need even as we face barriers along the way. Sometimes we have to walk through uncertain times like this pandemic. Accepting God's invitation to find new and creative ways of being the church.

Now for many of us we come to church, because it is comforting. It gives us a break from the problems we face outside those doors. It is uplifting to come together to sing hymns, to hear the good news of Jesus being proclaimed, to pray together, to come to the table together to celebrate communion. It is uplifting to connect with each other after service (**Image**). To talk to people who share similar values and beliefs. To feel like we are not alone in being Jesus' disciples in this world.

If the last eighteen months have taught us anything, it is how comforting and uplifting coming to church is for us, and how much we missed this presence in our lives. For us, that are unable to come to church yet, we continue to feel that longing to gather once again. We remember the comforts of the sanctuary we once stood safely in.

Yes. We did find new and creative ways to be church. But these ways didn't come without growing pains. These ways didn't come without some death to the way things used to be.

For many of us these ways were challenging, whether it was struggling with the technologies, or with getting used to worshipping in our living rooms (**Image**), or with adapting to zoom bible studies, or with finding different ways to help people from what we normally did.

Sometimes being one of Christ's disciples comes with taking up our crosses. It isn't all about comfort and uplifting feelings. Sometimes we will suffer to keep the church going. To keep this movement of Jesus going.

As we start coming back together, we know the path ahead will continue to come with its challenges and sufferings. Some of the ways we did ministry before will probably not come back in the way it used to. Some people may choose to move on, because this isn't what they signed up for.

The world has changed, and so, we will need to adapt to continue being the church in this new world. I don't know what this will look like. The journey ahead is more uncertain than it has ever been before. Well, at least in our lifetime.

But, as we see in our gospel, Jesus doesn't expect us to walk ahead blindly. Jesus leads us. Jesus takes the first step forward on our behalf. Showing us the way. Showing us how to endure the suffering and death we will experience a long the way. Jesus leads us. We are not alone as we walk ahead on this new path. Jesus leads us down this path from the cross to the resurrection. Jesus leads us down this path to new life.

What get's forgotten in Jesus' whole prediction is that he will rise in three days. Changing the world forever. Death does not keep Jesus down. The tomb on Easter morning is empty (**Image**). The resurrected Jesus stands before his followers. Before

us. The cross is transformed from a symbol of violence to a symbol of God's love for us **(Image)**. Jesus breathes on us the Holy Spirit so that Jesus can work in and through us to give us what we need to take up our crosses and follow him into this unknown future. To continue Jesus' movement proclaiming God's healing and love to all of God's creation.

Have faith. Jesus will lead us down this uncertain path as we try to be the church in this new world. As we try to keep Jesus' movement going. For those of you who felt somewhat disconnected from this movement over the past 18 months, and find yourselves standing before us today, welcome back to the cause. For those of you who became attracted to this movement through our YouTube channel, welcome to the cause. For those of you who still feel somewhat disconnected, because you are unable to come back to the church to worship at this time, believe that you still matter to God, believe that you still matter to all of us, and may you find your own way to continue to be part of this cause. Whether we are here in person, or online, we are all standing here today, ready to take up our crosses and follow Jesus from death to new life.

Let us pray, gracious God, lead us forward into this new world. Help us continue to be the church. Taking up our crosses to follow you. Keeping your movement alive and well in our community. Give us what we need to be your hands and feet in a world in need of your healing. Help us rebuild relationships with one another and with our community. **Amen.**

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