

Sermon June 21st, 2020

Jesus Walks with Us through Our Challenges into New Life

Our beliefs and behaviours are shaped by people we want to be like. People we look up to as model citizens. Like an athlete named Conor McDavid, or a musician named Taylor Swift, or a movie star named Dan George, or a teacher, or a parent, or a grandparent, or a aunt/uncle, or a good friend, or Mother Teresa, or Martin Luther King Jr., or Chief doctor Robert Joseph, or Sheila North-Wilson, or a motivational speaker we see on TED talks, or a spiritual leader.

These are the people we choose to follow on our Facebook pages or Twitter or Instagram accounts. These are people we invest time and energy into listening to, and in some cases spend quality time with.

As Christians. As disciples of Jesus. We hear Jesus' invitation for us this morning, "it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher." Or in other words, we are to live like Jesus. Our behaviors and beliefs are supposed to be shaped by Jesus' words and actions. This is how we are to live. Jesus being the main person we are to model in our lives.

Do you follow Jesus on Facebook or Twitter or Instagram? Or do you check in with the gospels once in a while to see what Jesus is up to? Do you send Jesus a text or a prayer to listen for what Jesus has to say?

Jesus invites us to follow him. To choose Jesus as our role model. So, to live our lives like Jesus.

Now when we are trying to live like someone it can be very challenging. Sometimes, our role models disappoint us. Sometimes, they set the bar really high. So, we doubt our ability to reach that bar. Sometimes, distractions get in our way.

Being like Jesus can be challenging at times. The disciples will find this out when they are not able to heal all the people they encounter in the towns of Israel they enter.

We find this out every time we struggle to find a moment or two to pray or read our Bibles. We find this out every time our pain and suffering drain our energy and motivation to reach out to God through our practices of faith. We find this out every time something comes up on Sunday morning making it more difficult for us to worship. Or in these more recent circumstances, having trouble accessing what we need, to participate in online worship. We find this out every time our neighbor does something that ticks us off making it harder for us to love them. We find this out every time we have financial issues challenging our ability to be generous to others. Sometimes we are challenged to live like Jesus.

Now, I don't know about you, but I find that though we are sometimes challenged to pray, or read our bibles, or be financially generous to others, or worship. I feel like I am still in my comfort zone as I face these challenges, and feel more able to change the way I am doing things when I am lacking in these areas.

What I feel is the most challenging part of being like Jesus is to love like Jesus does. Is to stand with those who the principalities and powers of our world have rejected? Is to walk with those living on the margins of our communities. It is this part of following Jesus that pushes me outside my comfort zone. Making it more difficult for me to change the way I am doing things when I am lacking in this area.

Jesus spends a huge part of his ministry going into these uncomfortable spaces to offer God's gracious healing love to the people living on the margins of society. And yet, many of us in the churches struggle to follow Jesus into these places. We struggle to stand with people who have been outcasted or labelled as sinful.

This is the most difficult challenge we face as the church, because when we stand with those who have been victimized in our communities, we too, risk becoming victimized right along with them. Whether it is from the authorities as Jesus experienced. Or from our communities, friends, and family who think these people deserve to be rejected, and that we shouldn't be associating with them.

It is challenging to love as Jesus loves. To stand with those on the margins of our society genuinely listening to their concerns. Empowering their voice. Helping them experience justice.

It is challenging to face those people in our world who are motivated by hate or self-righteousness. Those same people in our society who often have all the power.

Yet, as we follow Jesus through the gospels, we see Jesus time and time again facing the persecution of the Empire and the religious authorities as he stands with those on the margins of society. We see Jesus take shot after shot, and still enter another marginal place where people in need of hearing a gracious and loving message are waiting. We see that Jesus ends up being crucified for taking these risks.

Jesus gives up a lot to walk with people on the margins of society, and invites us to be like him. To love as Jesus loves. Standing on the margins with those our community, our principalities and powers, have rejected, and offering up words and actions that reflect God's gracious love to them. Gracious love that lifts us up when we have been beaten down. Gracious love that heals and cleanses us from the oppression we face. Gracious love that reassures us that God walks with us through our suffering as we stand with those who have been rejected. Gracious love that points us to the

cross/resurrection narrative where we see that God doesn't only walk with us through our suffering, but walks with us into new life.

New life that comes when we stand up against injustice. New life that comes when we experience God's healing from this pandemic.

New life that comes when we are able to see that God has given us the supports and love needed to rise above the challenges we face when trying to be like Jesus. Whether it is rearranging our schedule to make time to pray or read our bibles. Or receiving a surprising energy and hope from someone we love to reach out in prayer and devotion when suffering. Or tapping into our creative juices to create more worship experiences outside of Sunday morning. Or trusting that God has given us enough resources to continue to be generous even during financially difficult times. Or receiving the gift of patience to deal with our neighbors' imperfections with grace. Or to find the strength and courage to stand with those who have been mistreated in our communities including standing with our indigenous people on this national indigenous people day. Showing them that they are indeed loved and worthy of the same respect and dignity as everyone else.

New life that comes from the love of a gracious God who loves us all, even with all our imperfections.

Let us pray, gracious God, when we fall short of living like your Son show us mercy. When we struggle to connect with you, give us time, motivation, and creativity to seek you out. When we feel trapped in a life of scarcity help us trust in your caring nature. When we are afraid to stand up for justice grant us courage to walk with those who are rejected, and grace to love them as you love us. **Amen.**

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