

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

Psalm 22:23-31

Romans 4:13-25

Mark 8:31-38

Sermon February 25th, 2024

The Path Jesus Walks Down Isn't Easy

Up until this point in Mark's story of Jesus, the disciples have witnessed Jesus' power and authority as he exorcizes demons, calms the storm, heals the sick, and feeds thousands with a few loaves and fish. Everything they have seen from Jesus so far gives them reason to believe that Jesus will liberate them from the oppression of the Roman Empire.

Isn't this how every movement that tries to implement change in the community starts out? A leader's charisma and power attract followers who have this uncanny optimism and hope that their fate will finally change (**Image One:** picture of Martin Luther King Jr. preaching). That whatever principalities and powers are threatening their way of life will finally be brought to justice.

Isn't this how every relationship we enter into starts out? We come into the relationship wanting to spend a lot of time with this person, because everything we learn about this person interests us. It seems like they can do no wrong (**Image One**).

Isn't this how it is when we join a new church? Everything the church is doing excites us. Everyone is so nice. We get really involved. The pastor can do no wrong. Their sermons really speak to us. Energizing us to live out the gospel in our lives (**Image One**).

Or if you are the pastor coming in, there is a lot happening in the congregation that excites you. You see all the potential to do great things in the community with the congregation. It can feel like the congregation can do no wrong.

We often come into our new relationships with rose coloured goggles on.

Then we come across today's story, and the disciples are suddenly caught off guard, as well as the rest of Mark's audience. Following Jesus isn't all rainbows and unicorns. Jesus is going to suffer, and eventually be killed if he continues to live out his calling as the Messiah (**Image Two:** Jesus hanging from the cross).

In reaction, Peter doesn't handle this news very well. In fact, Peter tries to rebuke Jesus or in other words, Peter tries to overpower Jesus.

In response, Jesus rebukes Peter. Jesus tells Peter to get behind him. Peter is to follow Jesus. Even if this means he too will face suffering and eventual death (**Image Two**).

Jesus goes on to tell all of us that if we want to follow Jesus, we too will have to take up our crosses. We too will face challenges, suffering along the way.

Isn't this how every movement that tries to implement change in the community ends up? Some people resist the changes the movement is encouraging. Especially those principalities and powers that will be impacted negatively by these changes. People come out to counter-protest. Sometimes people react violently towards those who are supporting the movement (**Image Two**). Or they find other means to try and silence the movement.

There is no easy pathway towards change.

Isn't this how every relationship we enter into ends up? We get into that first disagreement with each other, and realize that relationships take some work to keep going. That there are some things about the person that annoy us. That there are things we will need to compromise on at times. That there will be some moments in the relationship where we feel like we are living through a scene from *The Shining* (**Image Two**).

Isn't this how it is when we have been at a church for a while. Not everything the church is doing excites us anymore. There are some people who annoy us. We find ourselves pulling away more. The pastor can do or say something that bothers us. Or their sermons start to sound redundant, dull. Uninspiring (**Image Two**).

Or if you are the pastor, people in the congregation or the congregation as a whole can do or say things that challenge your values or vision. The rose-coloured goggles suddenly get tossed off our heads.

Every pathway we walk down in our lives comes with joys and sufferings.

Including the pathway where we take up our crosses and follow Jesus (**Image Two**).

The good news of the gospel, is that though Jesus will suffer, be arrested, and crucified in response to his movement, Jesus will rise on the third day (**Image Three**: resurrected Christ).

When we face suffering along the road, whether it is from confronting an injustice, or from having a disagreement with a loved one, or from a hurt we experienced from someone or a group of people in the church, Jesus will breathe new life into us (**Image Three**). Jesus will help us learn and grow from our pain. Jesus will walk with us

through the initial joy, the eventual suffering, and into the new life we experience as we reconnect with that joy.

That even though Jesus will suffer and die on a cross (**Image Two**), that on the third day he will rise to new life (**Image Three**). Giving all those who follow him hope that no matter how hard the road is, that justice will prevail through the movements we live out that try to implement change in the community. That forgiveness and rekindled love will be experienced in our relationships where disagreement and conflict have occurred. Whether in our friendships or in our relationships with our siblings in Christ. That even though Jesus will suffer and die on a cross (**Image Two**), that on the third day he will rise to new life (**Image Three**).

Let us pray, gracious God, help us take up our crosses and follow you. When we face suffering give us patience and strength to endure. And grant us hope that we will experience new life. **Amen.**

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