

For This: He Came to Model the Way *Mark 8:31-38*

Introduction

Today is the second Sunday in Lent. On these Sundays, we are walking with Jesus toward the cross and empty tomb, two events in our church year calendar that are now only slightly more than 30 days away. We are inspired in this walk by a defining statement made by Jesus as He stood before Pontius Pilate a few hours after His arrest:

For this purpose I have been born, and for this I have come into the world...
(John 18:37)

In His words you heard our theme for this Lenten season: **“For This.”** Jesus came FOR THIS.

- Last week we met Jesus at the beginning of His earthly ministry. We once again joined Him in the waters of baptism, in the wilderness of temptation and in the first days of His preaching ministry. We proclaimed that JESUS CAME TO SHOW THE WAY, a way that would be marked by blessing, struggle and trust.
- Today we take a giant leap across the pages of our calendar – a three year leap in fact. Today we find Jesus in the closing days of His ministry.

Our truth for this day is that:

Jesus came to model the way.

Last week, He came to show the way. This week, He came to model the way. There is a difference, of course, between modeling something and showing it. Jesus did both, and both were necessary.

Let me illustrate the difference by reminding you of the childhood game: Follow the Leader. You remember how to play that, don't you?

- The very first thing you have to do is identify who the leader will be. That's usually the hardest part of the game. When we played, everyone wanted to be the leader. But the game doesn't work well if everyone is a leader.
- Once the leader has been identified, the participants all line up behind the leader. Now the game begins.
- The leader then moves around wherever he/she chooses, and he does all kinds of silly things and goes to all kinds of different places.
- Each participant has to mimic the leader's actions. Anyone who fails to follow or do what the leader does is out of the game.

Webster's dictionary tells us that a model is:

Model: a system or thing used as an example to follow or imitate.

To show, on the other hand, means:

Show: to cause something to be visible, to offer it for inspection.

It is one thing to sit on the porch and watch a leader go all kinds of places and do all sorts of things. It is something totally different get in line and do what the leader does.

Jesus called his disciples to:

Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. (Matthew 4:19)

In our Gospel reading for today He speaks to all would be disciples, issuing a clear and challenging call:

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 and for the gospel will save it.

When you read those words, it is clear that Jesus did everything He asks His disciples to do. He didn't just come to SHOW the way. He came to MODEL it as well. In other words, He came to call us off the porch and into the game. He called us to follow Him.

The call to follow ...

#1: RESULTS IN NEW PRIORITIES

First and foremost, the call to follow requires us to deny ourselves.

Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves... (Mark 8:34)

The Greek word here means that we ...

Go blind to ourselves and our self-interests.

As we follow Jesus, we begin to lose sight of the things that used to be the most things in our lives.

In the movie "The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey" there is a scene where Bilbo Baggins, the Hobbit who is accompanying 13 dwarves on a mission, unexpectedly disappears and seems to have abandoned the dwarves during a crucial battle. They were losing. Bilbo does return and the dwarves are victorious. Afterward Thorin (the dwarf leader) and Bilbo have a conversation.

[Thorin:] "Why did you come back? I want to know: why did you come back?"
[Bilbo:] "Look, I know you doubt me, I know you always have. And you're right, I often think of Bag End. I miss my books. And my armchair. And my garden. See, that's where I belong. That's home. And that's why I came back, cause you don't have one. A home. It was taken from you. But I will help you take it back if I can."

When someone denies themselves, what God wants becomes the higher priority. The Hobbit preferred his chair and his books and his own house. But those became secondary to the needs of the others. Jesus calls us to that.

But remember, Jesus doesn't just show us; He models it. Philippians 2 describes it like this:

Let the mindset of Jesus become your motivation. He existed in the form of God, yet he gave no thought to seizing equality with God as his supreme prize. Instead he emptied himself of his outward glory by reducing himself to the form of a lowly servant. He became human! He humbled himself and became vulnerable, choosing to be revealed as a man and was obedient. He was a perfect example, even in his death—a criminal's death by crucifixion! (Philippians 2:5b-8)

The call to follow also ...

#2: RESULTS IN A NEW IDENTITY

Mark 8:34 continues:

Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross... (Mark 8:34)

We find the phrase “take up your cross” to be confusing. But people in Jesus' day knew exactly what it meant. They saw scores of criminals picking up their crosses in order to carry them to the place of execution. They knew that if you were carrying a cross you had been tried in a court of law and found guilty. The cross identified you as a criminal. That's why Peter reacted as he did. He knew what the cross meant, and he knew that would not be true of Jesus.

But the death and resurrection of Jesus transformed that. What Jesus did turned the cross from the mark of a criminal – a symbol of defeat – into a reminder of the empty tomb – our symbol of victory.

Taking up your cross is not a daily reminder of suffering and pain. No, it is a reminder of your victory over everything the devil throws at you. As Paul wrote to the church in Rome:

We are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (Romans 8:37)

When you daily take up your cross, you are daily reaffirming your identity in Jesus Christ. I am a Christian. My life is shaped by what happened on a cross like this.

- Whatever comes my way today has already been defeated by Jesus.

One final brief observation. The call to follow also ...

#3: RESULTS IN A NEW VIEW OF LIFE

Let me remind you of verses:

For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? (Mark 8:35-37)

The life referred to here is not your physical life, but rather what happens to your soul. People whose lives are focused on their own physical comfort and well-being will ultimately discover all of that to be empty and meaningless. That's what the text means trying to save your life in an effort to gain it all.

Only those pursuits of God's will and purpose will lead us to a life of satisfaction and meaning.

There is only one life
T'will soon be past.
Only what's done
For Christ will last.

Jesus modeled for us that the life that matters is the life that thinks about others first, and seeks to do what is best for them, even if that means discomfort and disruption for the giver.

APPLICATION

The earliest verses of this text describe the moment when Jesus lays the future out for the disciples. It wasn't a pretty picture. So our friend Peter objected. "Jesus, You don't need to endure all of that. I'm sure there is an easier way."

He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. (Mark 8:32)

I wear a Fitbit watch. My goal every day is to get in 10,000 steps every day. Actually, that's 100% true. My goal is to get more steps each week than my daughter-in-law. On those days when I need to spend a lot of time at my desk, I have been tempted to shake my watch while sitting just to up the numbers. I need to get to 10,000 steps, and that would be so much easier. But I have resisted. So far, anyway.

Jesus likewise resisted the easy way. The way of the cross, the way Jesus modeled, is a way that requires me to increasingly see things the way Jesus sees them, and allow my life to be shaped by my identity as a Christian. It is a way that finds real joy in serving others, not in being served by them.

Amen.