

Scripture:
Matthew 16:21-28

The Cross and the Heartbreak

This is one of those passages that I would love to cut out some lines and paste in some new ones. Perhaps smooth it down a little - request that Jesus not be quite so harsh or blunt. Perhaps like some of the quotes we saw in our Labour day video. How are we called to work and be. I believe that is the crux of what Jesus is saying here, so why couldn't he have said come along with me and live a life worth living rather than carry a cross.

I am with Karoline Lewis when she says "I have never cared much for this passage, particularly 16:24, "take up your cross and follow me." I always get hung up on the "take up your cross" part, because most of the time I really do not know what that means. Or maybe it's because theologically, if I am honest, I have a rather negative reaction to cross language. It's not simply that I have issues with gruesome deaths. Or that I am one to eschew the meaningfulness of the crucifixion. But the ubiquity of the cross and our rather bland and rote statements about it have tamed the rather complex nature of its significance."¹

I am pretty sure I am not alone in this. Just last week I received some feedback on my 'high Christology.' So some of you might be a bit relieved to have just heard that confession. Other's reminded me it was summer and perhaps it wasn't the time to be asking such deep theological questions like "Who is Jesus." Quite frankly I wonder if when the lectionary founders put it together they realized they were putting these sorts of verses about 'taking up our cross' into the summertime worship when most people (including the clergy) are looking for bit more 'fluffly worship.' But none the less here is is. We are facing the cross. And facing a huge challenge and calling. So here we go...

Do you ever wonder what Jesus' cross has to do with our lives today?

Lewis says "What we confess about Jesus and his cross better *really* matter and make a difference for our lives, for how we think about God, and for how we live. If it does none of this, then I wonder if we take Jesus seriously at this point. I'm quite sure that Jesus' statement here is not theoretical or rhetorical but that Jesus actually wanted the disciples to live it and be it."² He must have been serious or else he wouldn't have broken Peter's heart and Spirit like that. Imagine being Peter in this moment. In last weeks scripture we hear him confess Jesus as

¹ <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=3300>

² IBID

Messiah. It is as if he is saying “I love and you and I believe in you as the one who shows me life and God.” Peter was speaking from his heart, risking what few would dare to say or believe.

So when Jesus then follows this up with “Good now that you know who I am you also need to know I am about to be killed for it.” Peter had nothing but a human response for one he loves and trusts. “Listen carefully to Matthew’s story once again: *He sternly ordered them not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah. From that time on, Jesus began to show them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.*”

Lose responds “Did you hear that? It’s the sound of the human heart breaking. First comes the distress that causes Peter’s heart to tremble, as soon after his confession Jesus orders the disciples not to tell anyone what they must consider the greatest news ever, that he is the Messiah. But then come events that splinter into Peter’s heart like cracks in a windshield. *Then he showed them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering – crack – and be rejected by the elders – crack – and chief priests – crack – and the scribes – crack.* And then comes the final chink, *and be killed!* And there it goes, Peter’s heart, fracturing into a thousand shards of disappointment and despair so loudly that he can’t even hear Jesus’ final promise, *and be raised on the third day.*

No wonder Peter rebukes him. This sounds like blasphemy. *The saviour of the world suffer? God’s messiah die? Are you mad?* Peter, like so many Israelites of his day, is looking for someone to deliver the Israelites from Roman oppression as Moses delivered them from Egypt. He expects the Messiah to be a descendant of mighty king David and come and overthrow Roman rule and restore the kingdom.

Are we really all that different? I know, we’re not looking for Moses or David, but don’t we still want a strong God, one who will vanquish our foes ... Don’t we also want a powerful God... granting us our hearts desire or at least protecting us from tragedy? Don’t we also want a potent God, one who will lead us and our congregations into a better and brighter future?

Of course we do. But what we get is not the Messiah that Peter longs for or we desire, but rather Jesus, the son born to illiterate parents in a backwater of the Roman Empire; Jesus, the itinerate preacher who proclaims a kingdom where losers are blessed, the poor are honored, and those considered least in the eyes of the world are accorded greatest honor; ... Jesus doesn’t just rebuke Peter, ... he rebukes the heart and soul of a world that believes ... those with the most power and wealth win. Jesus, proclaims a kingdom that is the inverse of the kingdom of the world and invites us into it.”³

Too often our theological teaching and preaching hides behind theories. Theories of atonement, or Christology. There are certain things we think we should say if we are a Christian. If we

³ <http://www.davidlose.net/2014/08/pentecost-12-a/>

don't believe the cross is this and that then we are probably heretics. But I wonder do we get it wrong when we spend too much time in theory? Do we miss the message of the life and death and resurrection when we make it about theories? And so I ask with all that has been said already about confessions, convictions, heartbreaks and promise in this sermon "What does this moment mean to you?" "What is Jesus saying?" "What does the cross mean to you?"

"Not what you think it *should* mean because you've been told what it should mean, because you are a Christian, because you go to church, because you are worried about what the minister will think, or because you fear that you might get kicked out of church altogether as some sort of imposter believer."⁴ What does it really mean?

The cross has meaning for me. Not because Jesus died and therefore I am saved but because of who it was that was killed on the cross. Now, right away some would call me a heretic, but I am speaking my truth and understanding in my faith journey at this time and I believe that is what we are called to. You see when it comes to what really matters to me about Jesus (who I would say I love) It is his life.

Karoline Lewis wrote "I resist "take up your cross" as a justification for suffering. I reject "take up your cross" as some sort of victimization or martyrdom for its own sake... Yet, if the cross is a symbol for defiance of empire? If the cross is representative of the absolute certainty of the incarnation? If the cross is a model for resistance to the status quo? If the cross is a reflection of our human propensity to emulate the voices that call for justice, for mercy, for compassion, for love? Well then, I am all for the cross. And I will readily take up that cross, any day."

Lose put it this way: We all "live with corrupted hearts that have been forced to mimic the relentless beat of the world's march toward death. So when Jesus calls us to self-denial and the cross, he isn't advocating acceptance of injustice, needless suffering, or cruel self-abnegation. He is rather warning us that our world-weary hearts must and will break time and again as we despair of the world's promises and take hold of God's pledge to conquer hate with love, to replace fear with courage, and to defeat death with resurrection life."⁵

That is what it mean to me to take up the cross. That is the kind of faith I long to live. One that offers grace, fights for justice, and lives in hope. That is a cross I am willing to carry. Amen.

⁴ Lewis

⁵ Lose