

Sermon, Rev. Rodger A. Babnew, Jr.
Second Sunday of Lent year B
Mark 8:31-38
February 25,2015

Good Morning,

Although Lent may seem like a strange time to talk about Christmas. Jesus words in today's Gospel reminded me of a particular gift from my childhood.

One received from my Great Uncle Allan,

Now, Uncle Allan was my paternal grandmother's older brother, A relative we only saw occasionally, but always on Christmas, So not that often. A survivor of the great depression, and a War World II veteran.

Uncle Allan knew what it meant to survive, So, Receiving Uncle Allan's gift each year was to the least, Interesting.

In contrast to all the other gifts under the tree, neatly wrapped in brightly colored wraps and adorned with bows, it was never a surprise to find a small lumpy package, wrapped in newspaper amongst those gifts.

It was not crayons, nor Legos, not even army men. Nope, it was socks.

Not just one year, but every year, a pair of socks – No, it was not an inside joke, or laziness, but simply his assumption of a useful gift.

Everyone needs socks, Right ?

Needless to say, these socks were not the first thing to be played with on Christmas morning.

But, truthfully were tossed aside and later thrown into the back of a dark drawer, waiting for the moment when a pair of socks is needed. And when I needed a pair of socks, They were there, Useful, warm a gift when I least expected it.

Now, with that being shared, on this second Sunday of Lent, we are still quite a ways from Jesus' death.

Also, around this time, I must acknowledge just as with my New Year's resolution, I have already failed in my Lenten plans.

Compared to Advent our other season of preparation, Lent just seems so hard sometimes.

Advent is a season of Joy and Hope, Preparing for the birth

Lent, on the other hand, is a period of intentional restrictions, and disciplines.

Instead of birth, Lent prepares us for Christs' death.

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Yet, In this season that seems like the opposite to the Joy of Advent,

There is still a gift.

And we see this gift in today's Gospel of Mark

Jesus tells Peter and the other disciples the uncomfortable reality of his ministry here on earth.

Jesus, must die, not even a peaceful death.

No, He is going to suffer, and he is going to be crucified.

This death will have pain, and anguish, and despair.

And Jesus is willing to talk about it.

Now, Imagine you are one of the disciples.....

You have been following Jesus around, learning and listening to him

You've dropped your entire life, and have lived with Jesus on the road.

You have abandoned your business..... Hung up your tax collectors license.

You have witnessed him feed five thousand people with a small boy's lunch.

You have seen him bring a dead girl back from the dead.

You are now convinced that HE IS THE MESSIAH, and now.....

Now after all of this.

Jesus is spending his time on earth talking about his death,

Talking about leaving you, behind.

Peter is uncomfortable with Jesus words,and we are too.

I imagine that after all Peter has gone through, the thought of losing Jesus, his friend, his teacher is just unthinkable.

Peter and the disciples were expecting a conquering warrior messiah,

And, instead their Messiah is telling them of his defeat.

This long-expected gift from God is not the biggest, nor the flashiest, or the trendiest present.

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Instead, this gift comes in a lumpy, ugly package.

Peter and the other disciples see this confession as the ultimate weakness.

Their great savior is not supposed to simply die.

There must be more to the story-

And, Jesus criticizes them for this thinking, He even calls Peter, Satan !!

Now, is there any bigger insult than the son of God calling you Satan??

But, why is this so horrible??

Peter's rejection of death and suffering is supposed to be natural, isn't it ??

We are taught in this world that our status, our positions, and our wealth are what make us powerful.

But, what Jesus is doing here is denying all power by worldly definitions,

His power comes from his humility

From him being willing to submit to human suffering.

God loves us so much, that Jesus is willing to die for us.

This gift of his vulnerable self.

The gift of a perfect man willing to humble himself so low, that he will be punished for no crime.

Peter sees this as a moment of humanity,

When in fact, this is just a glimpse of Jesus' divinity.

Perfect, Blameless

Jesus is willing to sacrifice himself, to lower himself so much,

Because of God's love for us.

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Now this is a radically different gift than a pair of socks.

Socks are not something I often view as necessary, But as Uncle Allan knew, They would be.

Just as the gift Jesus provides is something that is essential.

The divine example of humble submission, even to death on the cross is the reason for our faith.

Jesus subjects himself to the worse possible death,

That we may find reconciliation with our God and- forgiveness for our sins

Yet, there are other consequences for this gift.

This is not a present that can be received passively.....

God's gift does not end on his sacrifice.....

Jesus story does not end on the cross, or on the pinnacle of suffering, not even at his subsequent resurrection.

No, this is not the end,

Jesus shares that we are invited to follow him,

Even after his death.

Jesus invites us to take a journey with him.

His gift is one that does not end in his own vulnerability, but ask us to humble ourselves in his footsteps.

"TAKE UP THE CROSS" he says

No, he is not talking about simply wearing the cross around our necks as jewelry,

Or hanging it on our walls as a beautiful art display

The Cross is not a pitchfork to condemn others for behavior we deem immoral.

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It is not a microphone to project our voices over those whose voices we believe should be silenced.

Jesus does not say to climb to the top of the cross and stand above it.

No, Instead, take it up, raise it above ourselves, so That we are standing beneath it.

Underneath the cross is our place to reconcile how great a love Jesus has given us, and what that means in our lives.

This is an invitation, to grow, and to recognize the depths of God's love, and the power Jesus' demonstrated in conquering death.

Jesus did not have to follow the way of the cross.

Just as he made his choice, I wonder if we can fully accept the gift of Jesus as a sacrifice without following his examples of embracing weakness. And, Jesus never promises that this will be easy.

Yet, through death and resurrection he urges us to die to our own desires, and what we cling onto as our identities, So that he can make us new.

The death on the cross is not the end of the story. But, the beginning of a new life in Christ.

Recognizing that following a true Jesus lifestyle means –

Dying to all those individual desires, and instead, discovering the desires Jesus ask for us under the cross.

Jesus is calling us to be vulnerable in the same way that he shows this vulnerability.

To humble ourselves to our self-importance.

Not to destroy our self-worth, but to find it in Christ's worth

To give us new identities as a sign of God's love

He is asking us, to care about what he cares about,

And what is it that God cares about?

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In our world, we are in the constant pursuit of worldly titles

After years of running the race at a University,

Fighting for the best opportunities, internships and positions.

Trying to be good enough to fit into the standards of this world,

I know, I have felt these pressures personally.

This endless pursuit of the better and the best is the trap of a perfectionist, and it often leads into some messy and unhealthy situations

When you are so wrapped up into seeking status and glory, and do not look first to take up the cross,

We shun Jesus' desires for our lives

We reject the gift that we have been given

We shove that pair of socks into the back of that drawer.

Have you ever caught yourself constantly comparing yourself to others?

Have you ever felt that your best just is not enough?

Have you ever felt that you will not measure up?

I know I have!!

Jesus is calling us away from all of these standards, IN THIS MOMENT

He is calling us to GRASP HIS GIFT, and to root our new identities in this gift.

Now, this rejection of life is not a completely and total abandonment of our life's goals and ideas.

It is simply a re-grounding of identity.

We root ourselves in the gifts of God,

Instead of others perceptions of us.

We let God reinvent us as his children

Reinvent us as followers of Jesus

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Reinvent us as people who can take up the cross, and dare to love, as God loves.

And, this is not a challenge that we take alone.

For more than fifteen years in our sanctuary (here) I would be seated in the far corner all the way back, any further back and I would be seated in the Narthex. I always entered through the parish hall and would walk on the inside along the seats, unbeknownst to me for many years I would always walk past the fifth station of the Cross. On one Sunday it caught my eye and I realized, that Jesus was not carrying his cross alone, but that Simon is carrying it for him.

Even Jesus himself, did not carry his own physical cross in solitude, and it the same way neither do I, or any of you

We do not bear the burden of our crosses in solitude, but we carry our crosses together.

The gift of Jesus vulnerability, is not something that has consequences just for our relationship with God, But also with others.

This is against our culture, against every fiber of our being ---

To share our weaknesses and to trust that they will be heard and received, Well

I know this firsthand, That disclosing the details of your internal self with others can be absolutely terrifying.

But, this can be an important step for fully receiving Christ gift of vulnerability.

Letting others see your weakness, your fragile moments. Just as God let us see his moment.

Accepting that sometime you will need socks, when it gets cold. And that in fact socks are a useful gift that we need at some point.

This gift of vulnerability is something that we can receive through Christ.

The beauty of this gift is, that we can also share it.

Henri Nouwen, a catholic priest talked about this idea of taking up the cross as "Embracing Weakness", and he also challenges us, stating "once you have taken up that cross" he says "You will clearly be able to see the crosses that others have to bear"

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Christ gives us this gift of vulnerability not only as an example, But a call to the vulnerabilities of others.

It is an opportunity to not only receive. But to give.

Perhaps our friends are our socks at times, and perhaps at other times we are the socks for our friends.

One of the most beautiful things about the community in Christ, is that we are all called into relationship with those who we will never see, nor touch, hear or even speak to.

This profound love calls us to be a listening ear, and an understanding heart to those marginalized by the human sin of this world, and calls us to take on a Divine perspective in response.

To let our hearts bleed for others in the same way Jesus bled for us.

We are called to love and care for those who are physically, mentally and spiritually impoverished.

Those out wandering in the desert, looking for a better life for themselves and their families.

The young man imprisoned for twenty years for a crime that would normally require a five year sentence, simply based on the color of his skin.

That woman that sits across from you at a clinic or doctor's office, and wonders, if anyone cares about her pain.

And of course, always acknowledging the face that stares back when we look in the mirror, needs this love and caring as well.

We respond to the brokenness in our world, the same way we recognize brokenness in ourselves.

We embrace our brothers and sisters in Christ, just as we are embraced in Christ's love.

Our cross is not a platform of glory, But a symbol of humble love and sacrifice.

It is through this cross that we understand the full power of God.

Receiving this gift, choosing the cross, will not be an easy road to walk.

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It is through committing to reframing our minds to Jesus' humility, through denying our identities and the ways of this human world, and through taking up the cross that we acknowledge the depth of God's love.

When we are participants in this relationship with God, we are to reflect a little bit of the infinite love God shows for us.

So as we travel this season of Lent, acknowledge the gift Jesus has given us in his vulnerability,

Recognize your own need,

The gift that is the cross, carried for you. And , stay alert for the day you carry it for someone else.

Amen