

February 28, 2021      Pastor Leena Jensen

Grace to you and peace from God: Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. Season of Lent is the time to reflect, repent, and re-start our true and faithful *life*.

In the time of lent, we are to focus on our relationship with God. In the Gospel reading from Mark, Jesus gets serious with the disciples about his imminent future. Peter decides to challenge these notions of the suffering and death to come, but Jesus, in a stunning moment, sternly rebukes Peter, calling him Satan! We are reminded that we all go about our lives setting our minds on human things and not divine things in everyday life, and this is a direct cue to stop for a moment and think about the words of Jesus:

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Because we are so tied to “this” life, losing it for the sake of Jesus and for the sake of the Gospel is neither comfortable nor comforting. Speaking of our faith publicly ~ as in witnessing ~ is even more difficult for many of us.

I couldn't help but think about how do we live our lives? We are good Christians, we live from our hearts, our Christ center or do we live and take our cues from outside ourselves? This caused me to think of how people live their lives from the outside in, not from the heart out, but the outside in.

I would name people who live from the outside in, those who don't know what their political beliefs are until they read their favourite newspaper columnist, or their favourite blogger. Now we live in an age of social media influencers on the internet, people refer to them for what books to read, like Oprah's book club. Or we go to

Pinterest to plan our perfect Christmas party or we don't know what to wear we consult the social media fashion gurus. Just check out the magazines on the way out the grocery line there is someone there to tell you what you should do or not do and they are persuasive. These outside in people don't know how to respond to the controversial issues of the day until they check everyone else and still struggle to make up their own mind.

Living life from the outside in -- we have all been there at one point or another in our journeys. When we can understand this, it is how we actually manage day to day living. We are the same people Jesus had in mind when he talked about people who have gained the whole world but forfeited their lives. So, we have it backwards, Jesus says, live from the inside out, not from the outside in.

We must carry a cross to remind us that there are those who suffer and that we must fight for justice in the lives of others with our cross upon our backs. As Jesus died on the cross for us, we take up the cross to carry on the work Jesus did. Worked for social justice, helped those that suffered.

All around us we see injustice, we see unfair practices, and in taking up our cross, we see these injustices and understand what others are experiencing and living through. These are the things that we are called to correct. The cross we carry is our reminder of the correct direction our life needs to take.

Though it may take time, if we keep carrying the cross, we may learn that others suffer as we do. We must carry a cross to remind us that we are responsible in part for the cross that Jesus carried. When Rembrandt painted his famous work of the crucifixion called "The Three Crosses" which now hangs in the Louvre in Paris he did something most unusual. Among the faces in the crowd beneath the cross, he painted himself. That was his way

of saying that he could not envision the crucifixion without admitting that he had a participation in it. Unfortunately, there are some who never see that. They identify with the Christ on the cross, rather than the Rembrandt in the crowd.

In the hymn “Were you there when they crucified my Lord”, the emphasis is on the you and me. If we were to be perfectly honest, we would have to answer yes, I was there. Yes, I had a role in this. It is only as we come to that understanding that we can then sing the last part of the hymn: Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

If we infer, what happened to Jesus was so long ago and has nothing to do with us today, then I think we are missing the point of Jesus’ words, “Take up your cross and follow me.” Jesus does not simply want us to remember his cross as something he himself suffered on our behalf. If he did, he would have simply said take up MY cross and follow me. Instead, he told us to take up our own cross. I think by that he meant that we need to identify with the event of the crucifixion as to see ourselves in the story. It is not simply His story; it is our story as well. I think that it is most tragic if we go through this entire Lenten season and never fully understand our role in the whole crucifixion drama.

So, why must we carry a cross? To remind us, that there are others in this world who suffer, and that ultimately, we are responsible for the indignity and shame which Christ suffered upon the cross. But you have a choice. You can lay down the cross you have been given to bear and passively live your life with no challenges or you can take it up and be transformed, living for something greater than yourself. The choice is yours. I encourage you though, Take it Up! Take up your cross, come, and follow Him! Amen.