

The Cross – Life or Death

Matthew 16:21-28

These verses can make your head spin

Upon first glance, they do not seem too difficult to understand

But the longer you hang around in them, the dizzier you get and the more they start to play tricks on you

Deny yourselves. Take up your cross.

Those who want to save their life will lose it

and those who lose their life for my sake will find it

So... If I am selfish with my life I will lose my life

But if I am generous and give up my life,I will gain it

Therefore,I will be generous with my life,because I know that I want to gain it

But...wait

Then am I simply being generous for my own gain?

Am I simply being generous to save my own neck?

It can be a dizzying text

Sadly I think there are two ways that most people interpret this text

1. Some hear itas a call to live a meager life

denying themselves of joy

denying themselves of an abundant and full life

It is an attempt to delay joy and to delay gratification until they reach heaven

They are convinced the more I deny myself life's comforts here and now, the greater my reward will be in heaven

In essence.....No pain, no gain

2. Others hear this text as a justification or a reason for the suffering that has already burrowed into their life.

They may say when faced with suffering....."This must be my cross to bear,"

It paints the picture of a drill sergeant God who is in the business of giving you more and more obstacles more and more struggles in your life to see how long you can endure them

I am afraid that because of this interpretation many have endured hardships for years that they should not have

Terrified each day, they endure, they hang on, believing it is a cross that God has called them to bear

So they just grin and bear it,..... trying to trust in a Godwho can seem so cruel

If these were the only two ways to hear this text, then I want nothing to do with it

Yet what ifwhat if there is another way.... of hearing this text?

It seems to methat our walk with Godis not about a call to a life of suffering

It is not about denying one's selfthe pleasures in life...in order to receive a future joy in heaven

It is not about a God who is simply playing a game with us

I believe that this text is not about a reasonfor our suffering

It is not about a Godthat tests us by giving us different crosses to bear

Asking us to carry them in order to show the level of commitment and the endurance of our faith.

Church, what if this text is about..... not being afraid.

Not being afraid of death.

About not fearing the suffering places in our lives that can often feelso muchlike death.

The moment we start to fear death...., it will not be long beforewe start to also fear life.

This was the casefor Peter

Just before our text in Matthew, Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?"

Peter is the one who steps forward and says,"You are the Messiah, the son of the living God."

Jesus affirms Peter by saying, "Yes,blessed are you, Peter"

The only problem is Peter is expecting a different kind of Messiah

In Peter's mind, the Messiah is one who comes in strength and power

One who will defeat the evil powers of the world

And as a follower of Jesus, Peter expects to be part of such a glorious battle

So when Jesus begins to share with his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem

That he must undergo great suffering and death,..... it is no wonder that Peter cries out,
"God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you"
Suffering and death were not the future Peter envisioned for Messiah
And they were not the future he envisionedfor himself

If Jesus must go to Jerusalem and face suffering and death, doesn't that mean that Peter As one of his disciples.....must go and experience the same?

Peter surly was afraid for Jesus' life,..... but he was more afraid for his own life

*Hear me on this: The moment we start to fear death, it will not be long.... before we start to fear life
(REPEAT)

A mother who was so focused on protecting her own children from any danger in the world kept them home-schooled..... which was finebut in addition she never let them outsidethe house
As a result they had no concept of friends.... or how to make them
She had convinced them that the world was an evil place and that they must fear it
She did this because she thought She believed.... That this would protect her children and keep them alive,
Yet, in the endthey all needed much therapy,she had suffocating the life out of them

The moment we start to fear evil The moment we start to fear death, it will not long before we will start to fear life.

Church Jesus wants usto have life

Jesus is in search..... of life

An abundant life. For each of us

Nowdid you catchthat **Jesus is in search of life?**

I did not see it at first either

Listen to the text once again... BIBLE "*Jesus began to show his disciplesthat he must go to Jerusalemand undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, ...and be killed,and on the third day be raised.*"

And on the third day..... be raised

Resurrection.

Jesus is not going to Jerusalem in search of deathbut he is going in search of life

A New life. An Abundant life. A Resurrected life

Jesus asks us to take up our cross and following him not to deathbut to a resurrected life

This text is aboutnot fearing evil not fearing death not fearing those suffering moments in lifethat can feel like death

Do not fear death..... For once you start to fear death,it will not long before you will start to fear life

In life there will be pain

In life there will be suffering

It is part of the human experience

Jesus asks his followers, to take up our crosses and follow him into Jerusalem

And Church he is asking you and I..... to do the same

Not because He wants to give us pain and suffering

but because He knows we already..... have pain and suffering

Jesus is fully God and he is fully human

He has experienced Pain He has experienced suffering

Pain and Sufferingare a part of the human experience. Part of the world

And Church.....God loves the world

When Jesus tells us to take up our cross and to follow him, He is saying we will go through this togetherin search of life

A New life.... An Abundant life.... A Resurrected life

So we take up our crosses..... because there are crosses to be taken upwhat else is there to do?

The only other optionis to deny that there are any crosses..... in this world

Which will lead us into denial a fear of evil... a fear of death, thus a fear of life

To take up one's cross..... is to embrace both the pain and suffering of the worldand to embrace the hopeof discovering lifewithin it

A full life..... is not one that is absent of suffering,

but one that faces such suffering with the courage to search for life, resurrected life, in the midst of it all

Jesus calls us to seekand bring forth lifein the midst of death

The path to walk...is ours ...to choose

But remember,if you try to save your own lifeyou will lose it

To be afraid of evil... to be afraid of death is to be afraid of life

When you fear death, you can act as if the cancer is not there

And miss the life-giving experienceof telling your children and grandchildrenall the stories

that you yearn to share with them..... before your heart beats..... its last

Church....take up the crosses in your lifewhatever they may be

Why?

Because we all have crossesin our lives

And as you carrying your cross, you just might just find a person who has a cross like yours

who has found a way to carry itthat makes ita little less painful

A full life is not one that is absent of suffering

but one that faces such suffering with the courage to search for life, a resurrected life, in the midst of it all

Jesus calls us to seek..... and bring forth lifein the midst of death

To seek.....A New life... an Abundant life...A Resurrected life

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