

March 29, 2020 Portraits Pt. 4 Jesus: The Sacrificial Lamb
Luke 9:18-27

Good morning and thank you for visiting St. Andrew's Website. I have been calling people since the suspension of worship services. I must tell you, I am moved by the number of people who have said to me, "how much they miss the services, the fellowship, the body-life of our church family." I also want to say thank you to those who have asked how Barbara and I are doing. Be assured that by the grace of God we are well. I have been physically active, walking close to 17,000 steps a day. The largest parts of that are 2 walks I make with Gambler (the larger of our 2 dogs.) But more than half of that step count is inside our home...from the bedroom wall at one end, to the picture window in the living room. The exercise means I sleep well. And the exercise is the most powerful natural antidote to the temptation toward depression. This morning, for the first time I heard on the television that the new number of Covid-19 cases in both Ontario and B.C. are actually down over the day before. While it is only one day, it is reason to be encouraged. And the Spirit of the living God, of Jesus is our greatest Encourager!!

In preparation for Easter, the celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus, we have been looking at portraits of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. We began with Jesus the Life Changer. When Jesus called the disciples to follow HIM, HE changed their lives. When Jesus called and calls us to follow HIM, HE changes our lives. That I am writing on Saturday

morning and you are reading this is a genuine sign of the change Jesus has brought about in both your life and mine.

Then we turned to Luke 7, Jesus The Man With Authority. We listened as a Gentile, a Roman centurion requested through his Jewish friends: elders of the synagogue that the centurion had financed in Capernaum, spoke about his understanding of authority. He gave orders in the military and they were obeyed. His dear friend a servant was sick and dying. The centurion asked Jesus to give the order that would restore the health of this sick servant. Jesus commented that the centurion had demonstrated great faith. The miracle of healing occurred. Jesus had and has unique authority, another reason to be encouraged in this current world wide plague of Covid-19.

In Luke 8 we looked at the portrait of Jesus as the Light That Reveals. This is one of those things at which the modern mind truly rebels. Whether it is Jesus' miracles of healing, of restoration, or the wisdom of HIS teaching, what Jesus is about, is the revelation of the redeeming love of God the Father. When Jesus moves us, touches us, is with us, and with our friends and loved ones, what we are seeing is nothing less than God present with us. I repeat, the modern mind rebels at being called to exercise faith in Jesus. And we need look no further than the New Testament to see it has always been that way. When Jesus spoke of new life through faith what was the reaction? "How can these things be?" As one of my favourite choruses says, "Humble yourself in the sight of the

Lord, And HE will lift you up...Higher and higher and HE will lift you up." I labour to remember that daily.

Today we turn to Luke chapter 9:18-27. Jesus is The Sacrificial Lamb. As we focus our attention more and more on the approach of the Easter season we tend to lose sight of the fact that Jesus walked this Earth to accomplish a mission...to do HIS Father's high and holy will. He came to redeem, to save, to give new life through faith in HIMSELF. The resurrection of Jesus on the Sunday morning, (which is why we worship primarily on Sundays)...the resurrection may be the moment at which that was revealed beyond denial, but for 33 years it was the reason Jesus was with us on this planet. For three years of active ministry Jesus was preparing those who responded to HIM for that revelation. He knew why HE was here. And HE knew the cross was waiting for HIM and had HIS name upon it. You and I and all the believers of every age...we were on HIS mind in Galilee, in Cana and Capernaum, and in Jerusalem, when he taught on the Temple steps, when HE drove the money lenders out of the Temple. He had us in mind, and was committed to the task of redeeming us on that old rugged cross.

In Luke9 we are told that there was a moment when Jesus was praying in a private place, the disciples being with HIM, as they so often were, HE asked this question, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" The question is specific. Its' answer is descriptive of the facts. The disciples knew the answer and they shared what they knew. Some thought Jesus

was John the Baptist somehow returned from the dead. Some thought Jesus was one of the famous Old Testament prophets returned from the dead. We are aware that there are a host of people on this planet who recognize Jesus only as a significant servant of God, messenger of God, somehow come back to life, to teach us lessons.

This reality led to Jesus asking the 12 a second question. It is a very personal question. And it is the key question that all of us have to answer. "Who do you say that I am?" Who do you say that Jesus is? Notice the tense of the verb in that question. We are not being asked (because we are HIS disciples in this present time 2020 with Covid-19 making people sick and killing people all around this precious planet) who we think Jesus was....but who HE is. Right now! Today!

Luke tells us that Peter was the one who answered the question in that private place where Jesus had been praying, and I have no doubt the 12 had been praying as well. What Peter said is for him a defining moment, "You are the Christ of God." You are the ONE promised in Isaiah 53 that is, God in the flesh, come into the world to save people, because God loves us, one and all. This begs the question, why did Jesus then ask them not to tell others this news? The answer of course is that it is not an academic or theoretical question to be answered by the words of someone else. We must and we do learn that answer for ourselves in the encounters we are privileged to experience with the Lord our God by means of His Holy Spirit.

But here is the point of today's lesson. Jesus immediately defined HIMSELF and HIS mission in specific terms which make the point Calvary was not some grand tragedy, but the unfolding of the grace of God strong to save. "The Son of Man (the Christ) must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the Law, and he must be killed, and on the third day (Friday, Saturday, SUNDAY) be raised to life." It was why Jesus was on earth, born in Bethlehem, raised in Nazareth, making the journey through ministry to Jerusalem and Golgotha where the cross awaits HIM.

And in light of our current situation we should notice what Jesus said to the 12 in that private place where they had been praying. "If anyone would come after me, (follow me), he/she must take up his/her cross daily and follow me." We should never be puzzled that life unfolds in such a way that suffering and pain becomes part of what we experience. In the isolation of this moment we taste of the isolation of Jesus on the cross. No one promised us, certainly Jesus did not say, it would be easy to follow HIM. When we find it is hard to be faithful, we are indeed following the Lord.

Barbara and I went out briefly during the week to deliver a care package to someone who was ill. It was a reminder that serving others at personal cost is the routine of what following Jesus does. And if we touch others with what they regard as mercy, as joy, as a sign of peace present, then

indeed we have managed to lift that cross and drag it a significant few yards in Jesus name.

Jesus always understood where and how HIS journey, HIS life on earth was going to end. He was not here to satisfy HIMSELF, HE was here to save lives no matter the cost. And this is the most important detail. Jesus understood that the cost of saving lives was that HE would be the sacrificial lamb offered...yes, offered, for the lives of many.

May God encourage you today as you spend time at home in the midst of a world wide plague. Let us pray for those whose lives have ended and will end in the midst of sickness. Let us pray for those who are mourning the loss of loved ones and friends. Please, please continue in your efforts to remain at home. That is what we will be doing. When I mention going for walk with Gambler be assured I am walking alone on empty sidewalks, seldom seeing anyone else on the same track and never closer than 20 feet, which is much more than the recommended spacing.

Lord here our prayer;

Watch over us. Protect us by the means of YOUR SPIRIT. Grant that we may minister to one another when we see need which we can alleviate. Remind us that your grace is more powerful than any virus, and that your gift is life eternal. Help us that we might please YOU in the manner in which we spend our time and our talents in the time that

remains to us. May your name be glorified in what we do, and the manner in which we do it. Amen