

2nd SUNDAY IN LENT

March 4, 2012

He Leads Me in Paths of Righteousness

FIRST UNITED

METHODIST CHURCH

An Open-Spirited Community of Faith and Action

The Lord is my Shepherd, I'll not want...

He leadeth me in paths of righteousness... Psalm 23:1, 3



Sam is wearing an alb – a simple 1st Century servant's robe- for Lent. He has some pretty good stories about peoples' reactions to him in the alb. When he was buying things in Hobby Lobby someone yelled at him, "Hey, Jesus, why aren't you answering my prayers?"

It's not easy to do something public that shows you follow Christ. That's part of what Christ tells us in today's Gospel: "Take up your cross and follow me."

I'd like to say I understand this passage "Take up your cross...and follow me." I don't understand it fully, but I am fascinated by it.

I understand a few things clearly: Peter cares about Jesus' safety. Peter also knows how powerful Jesus is. Another Gospel writer tells us this is the point where he says, "**You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.**"

Peter seems to be asking Jesus to use his power keep himself safe and to fix the world right now: "We are struggling under Rome's oppressive power. You have the power. You have the vision. **Fix things for us. Right now.**"

Jesus' response: "Get behind me Satan" means "That is a temptation" The surprise is that he calls Peter "Satan" or "tempter." Then he asks him to come along with him. "Get behind me...take your cross, and follow me."

At this point I want to go back to the Old Testament passage for today. It is so full of grace. It is full of humor. God calls Abram a name, too" God actually changes Abram's name:

⁴...You will be the ancestor of many nations. ⁵You are no longer to be called Abram, "Respected Parent," but Abraham, "Progenitor of a Multitude," for you are the progenitor of a multitude of nations.

God changes Sarai's name too:

¹⁵God said, "As for Sarai, her name will now be Sarah, "Noblewoman."

¹⁶I will bless her, and I will give you a child by her.

I will bless her and rulers of peoples will come from her."

That is when Abraham laughed.

¹⁷Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself,

"Is a child to be born of a man who is 100 years old?..."

¹⁸But to God Abraham said aloud, "Oh, if only Ishmael might live before you!"

God is so gracious that God said, "Okay laugh. You can name your baby that will be born 'Laughter' (Isaac)."

In both the Abraham story and the Peter story, I hear the voice of the Divine one saying: "**Come along with me.**"

Sometimes we use the phrase "take up my cross" as a way of saying "unless I am suffering some kind of way I am not a good follower." The cross *was* a symbol of Roman power. Taking up a cross was not a happy experience. Moreover, the cross was a method Rome's armies used to keep nations they conquered in line. When people saw the parade of people carrying their crosses out of the city, they knew that Rome's army could march into their lives at any time and force bad things to happen.

One of the most amazing things about "take up your cross" to me is that within a generation the first Christians took an instrument of death and subjugation and turned it into a symbol for self-giving and redeeming love.

Now anywhere in the world where we see a cross we don't think "pick it up and suffer," we think, "That is a place where Christians worship." Or we think "that person wearing a cross is following Christ."

Jesus says to Peter and us:

Don't focus on human things, but think along with me on Divine Things:
In fact... "If you want to be my followers... take up your cross and follow me.

³⁵**For those who cling to their [own understanding of this] life will lose it, and those who lose their life [serving others] will find their [meaning in] life.**

I invite you to think about this passage as a simple invitation by Jesus to come along with him and be with him wherever he is working in the world right now. **It is an invitation that says, "it is okay if you have a heavy burden.**

Bring it with you. Just come along with me.

Pick up that cross and come!"

Some of us may have unfulfilled desires to make a difference or to find meaning for our lives. Jesus is saying, **"That is all right, come with me. Carry those longings for new meaning with you. When you lose yourself connecting with others – and with me – you will actually find yourself.**

Paul said it best. He listed ways early Christians were struggling, and said:

³⁴**What then are we to say about these things?**

If God is for us, who is against us?

³⁵**Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?**

³⁷**No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through God who loves us.**

Nothing separates us from Divine Love. Not even our misunderstandings. (Abraham and Peter found that out).

More than anything else, Jesus wants us to come along with him. It can be hard. We can't see him physically. We can see where he is at work:

- Wherever people bridging the gap between powerful and the weak,
- Wherever people are caring for the sick.
- Wherever people are nurturing the young.
- Wherever people are singing in the face of life's struggles -Christ is there

Another way of saying this is no matter what: disciples build community.

I know the Scriptures are full of Jesus' invitation to come along with him.

- Jesus walked the lakeshore and invited people to "Come follow me,"
- Jesus invited his friends to the "other side of the lake" to pray.
- Jesus invited himself to Zaccheus' home.
- Jesus invited his friends to walk with him to Jerusalem.
- In the tender moments after the resurrection Jesus said Peter (and to all of us) "Do you love me? Follow me!"

"Take up your cross" true meaning is in simple phrases of Psalm 23:

**The Lord is my Shepherd,
and that means no matter what we face,
(either temptations or wild beasts of life)
we have more than enough.**

We are surrounded by goodness and nurturing love.

**God takes the initiative
in restoring our souls to right-relationships.**

**Even in the valley of struggle, suffering, and death,
no evil can claim us**

Jesus says simply, then, and now:

**"Come along with me. No matter what you have to carry.
No matter what you don't understand.
This is what righteousness means" right relationship. Walk with me."
Nothing will separate us.**

EPISTLE SCRIPTURE ROMANS 8:11-39

The Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you,
The One who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies
also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

¹⁸I consider that the sufferings of this present time
are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us...

²⁸We know that all things work together for good
for those who love God, who are called according to God's purpose...

³¹What then are we to say about these things?

If God is for us, who is against us?...

³⁵Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship,
or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

³⁷**No, in all these things we are more than conquerors
through God who loves us.**

³⁸**For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor
rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,**

³⁹**nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation,
will be able to separate us from the love of God
in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

***GOSPEL MARK 8:31-36**

Please turn in your Pew Bible to New Testament p. 44

³¹Then he began to teach them
that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering,
and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes,
and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³²He said all this quite openly.
And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

³³But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said,
“Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind
not on divine things but on human things.”

³⁴He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them,
“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves
and take up their cross and follow me.

³⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it,
and those who lose their life for my sake,
and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.

³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?

