

Sermon: 2nd Sunday in Lent

Text: Mark 8:27-38

Theme: The Cross

Goal: What does the cross mean for us.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: When we talk about 'cross' in our lives, sometimes we think about a sickness, or a specific family situation that we are facing, or another heavy problem. “James (or Beth) has a big cross to carry”, we say when someone has a handicapped child.

Jesus is talking about a specific type of cross in our text: First, about His own cross; and second, about the cross that we have to carry because we are His followers. Let's see what does this mean in our lives:

I – Jesus' cross

Before talking about His cross, Jesus wanted to be sure about the faith of His disciples, if they were ready to accept His plain teaching. The dialogue with the disciples about “Who Jesus is” takes us to a reflection about our opinion (and faith, of course) and the opinion of many about Jesus. At Jesus' time and nowadays, people have very different views about Jesus. We have talked several times about this here. Each of us has to answer that question personally: “What about you? Who do you say Jesus is?”

Peter answered right and gave a good testimony of his faith, confessing that Jesus was the Christ, the promised Messiah. But as the term “Messiah” was full of political hope, - people were expecting an earthly king, - Jesus warned the disciples not to tell anyone about Him as the Messiah. People would misunderstand the mission of the

Messiah.

O.K. After Peter's confession, Jesus “then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this”. The suffering Messiah was clearly prophesied in Isaiah 53 and in other texts. But people preferred to ignore these prophetic texts about the Messiah and to look only for a warrior Messiah, a king Messiah, that would free them from the Romans and other enemies.

As we are in Lent, it is always good for us to remember these prophecies and Jesus' teaching about His suffering as well. The temptation is to look to Jesus only as a physical and earthly helper; and to forget the everlasting covenant that He made with us by His blood shed on the cross. The blessings He wants to give us are much bigger than just a healing or some prosperity. He promises and gives us life with God, here and in eternity. And this kind of life with Jesus gives us peace, as the Apostle Paul wrote in such a nice way in Romans chapter 5.

In spite of Peter's previous bold confession of Jesus, the Messiah, he didn't accept Jesus' teaching about His suffering and death. He even didn't listen to the end: to the promise of Jesus' resurrection after three days. Peter “took Him aside and began to rebuke Him”. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to You!” (Matt 16:22). Peter wanted a strong and victorious Messiah, not a weak one, a suffering one. He wanted to be disciple of a future king, not of a future death hero. His discipleship was ambitious!

Sorry for Peter... Satan was using him to divert Jesus from His goal to be sacrificed on behalf of all humankind. Peter wanted an easier way to follow Jesus, not the hardest way of suffering. And Jesus needed to rebuke Peter in a sharp way: “Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”

II – Our cross

The way Jesus rebuked Peter helps us to understand better what Jesus is talking about when He speaks about our cross: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.” If we have in mind only the things of men, like Peter had that very day, we are not true disciples and we are not carrying our cross.

This means “to deny ourselves”: To have in mind the things of God, not only our own things, ideas, wishes, opinions. And we know how difficult this is. Our selfishness is always big and at the center of our decisions. Discipleship proposes to look to the others, with love, even when this gives us no advantage. “Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Matt 20:28).

Jesus explains more what does it mean to “have in mind the things of God, and not the things of men”: “What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?” We know so many stories of people who gathered lots of riches during their lives...this was their only goal... for what? At the end of their lives they were hopeless. - We need to be aware of the difference between the right and responsibility to be a faithful worker (or student, or professional) who grows in his position, and the sinful selfish ambition, wanting to get everything and to grow, even without respect for others. It is always a big challenge for a Christian to take decisions in his/her professional life, decisions that will please God and that will be for the good of his fellows. This is sometimes a big cross in the life of some Christians. People who don't “have in mind the things of God” can take decisions to their own advantage, if the decision will hurt others or not. A follower of Christ tries to take decisions according to his/her Christian ethics.

Illustration: Lidia read the news this week about a Christian Psychologist in Brazil. She put in the Face Book her picture reading the Bible, ('her ethic guide', as she confesses), and some Christian declarations. She was taken to the court of the Psychologist Association. If she doesn't take out the picture and the declarations, she can lose her license to be a psychologist. - This happens in a country where there is freedom of expression, and where homosexuals and all kind of behaviors express their opinion free. But a Christian cannot confess his/her faith publicly anymore. This is persecution and a real 'cross' for that lady.

Conclusion: “What can you give in exchange for your soul?” is the question that Jesus raises in this discussion. There is no money enough in the world that can buy a single soul. As we sang last Sunday: “*What can wash my sin away? Nothing but the blood of Jesus!*” Or, as Luther explains in the Second Article of the Creed: I believe that “*Jesus Christ... is my Lord. Who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness...*”

And to achieve this, Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, had to face suffering and death on our behalf, as He was teaching His disciples in our text. Only after His glorious resurrection they could understand what He was talking about, they remembered the prophecies, and really believed in Jesus as the Christ, the Saviour!

We are still facing Lent in our lives: sufferings, sorrows, cross, because of our faith. But we live in the hope of the resurrected Christ and of our own resurrection. In spite of Lent, we can celebrate Easter every Sunday as we come together at the Lord's Table around the body and blood of our Resurrected Saviour! This gives us strength and hope!
Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle -Cape Town, 04 March 2012

