

## SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

Cross of Glory Evangelical Lutheran Church

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### Can You Afford To Be a Member of This Church?

#### Mark 8:31-38

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.<sup>32</sup> He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.<sup>33</sup> But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."<sup>34</sup> Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.<sup>35</sup> For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.<sup>36</sup> What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?<sup>37</sup> Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?<sup>38</sup> If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

Day after day, we hear more news about our country's struggling economy. Many people are concerned about their jobs, their income and their savings. In hard economic times, one thing that happens is people become more reluctant to make big purchases. More and more, they ask themselves the question: Is this something I can really afford? This morning, I want to take some time thinking about the question of whether or not you can afford to be a member of this congregation. As we look at Jesus' words to the crowd, we find out exactly what is the cost of being one of his followers. And the next question that naturally comes to mind is this: Is it something we can afford?

Before Jesus talks about what it will cost each of us to be members of this church, he first tells us what it costs him to be the Lord and Savior of this church. He does this by speaking plainly to his disciples about his approaching suffering, death and resurrection. These were words that were difficult for the disciples to understand. The first years of Jesus' ministry were filled with wonderful and miraculous events. The disciples witnessed Jesus perform miracle after miracle. They watched him change water into wine. They watched him heal diseases and cast out demons. They probably wanted it to never stop. Now, Jesus was letting them know that there were much more difficult days ahead. He was going to be betrayed. He was going to be rejected. He was going to be killed. He would have to rise from the dead.

These words were not ones the disciples like to hear. They thought it sounded like the cost was too great for Jesus. Peter, as the spokesman for the group, let Jesus know just that. Mark writes that Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him. The Greek word Mark uses here means that Peter showed his strong disapproval for Jesus' words. Peter wanted Jesus to stop speaking this way. He didn't want Jesus to keep talking about suffering, rejection and death. He wanted Jesus to move on to a more pleasant subject. Jesus knew that it was not possible. Jesus knew the cost. He had known it from the time he set foot on this sinful earth. Jesus knew that it was necessary for him to suffer and die. So he, in turn, rebuked Peter with some very harsh words: "*Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.*"

Peter needed to learn an important lesson. He need to learn about the cost of salvation. He also needed to learn about the cost of following Jesus. This lesson was so important that Jesus wanted more people than just Peter to hear it. We read that Jesus then called the crowd to him along with the disciples and spoke for everyone to hear. And this is what he said: "*If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*"<sup>35</sup> *For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.*<sup>36</sup> *What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?*<sup>37</sup> *Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?*<sup>38</sup> *If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.*" With these words, Jesus let Peter, the other disciples and anyone else within earshot know what it takes to be a member of his church.

It is certainly a high price. It is summed up in the first sentence we just read: "*If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*" The cost of being a Christian means denying oneself and carrying a cross. What does it mean to deny oneself? I think we can use Jesus' words from the previous verse. It means to not have in mind the things of man, but rather the things of God. It means to not live to indulge yourself and your desires, but rather to please God and serve him. I think it is hard for us to begin to comprehend what it means to completely deny oneself. We are so wrapped up in doing just the opposite. We are so concerned about looking out for "number one," worrying about our own health and wealth that denying ourselves even the least bit of joy or pleasure for the Lord is unthinkable. But that is exactly what Jesus is speaking about here—to deny yourself means you think of the Lord and his work before you think about yourself.

The other part of the cost that Jesus describes is taking up one's cross. What is a cross? It is a device used for torture and execution. There is nothing pleasant about the cross. Taking up your cross means suffering for the Lord. This is part of the cost. It means that devoting your life to Jesus doesn't result in a life free from trials and troubles. In fact, when you follow Jesus you can expect even more troubles and hardships in your life. This is the cost. It's a price that you, by your sinful nature, don't want to pay. You say: "Deny myself and suffer for the Lord? No way! I just can't afford that. Life is supposed to be fun. That doesn't sound like fun at all. It's too high a price to pay."

Thank God that Jesus didn't look at the cost from a similar sinful perspective. Jesus knew the cost of saving our souls and he was willing to pay it. Jesus knew what it meant to deny himself. Do you think that Jesus would not have preferred, in his human nature, to listen to Peter's words and stop talking about his suffering. What did Jesus pray in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Father, if there is any other way..." Yet what else did he pray, "Not my will but yours be done." He denied himself and had only in mind the things of God. He did just as his Father willed even when it meant sacrifice.

And Jesus certainly took up his cross. He did that very literally as he carried his own cross to the hill called Golgotha. He then had his arms stretched out on that cross and was put to death on it. No one has ever suffered like Jesus' suffered-as a completely innocent victim. He did this in your place. He did what you couldn't do. He paid the price of your salvation with his innocent blood. The end result of his work was your salvation. Jesus paid the cost. You receive the reward.

It is good for each of us to keep this truth in mind when we contemplate the cost of being one of Christ's followers. It might seem to us that we can't afford to be a member of this congregation because of the high cost. But what will be the end result if we listen to such logic? We might have a short time gain. If you chose to quit following Jesus today and you resigned your membership in this congregation, you would see some immediate gains. You'd have some extra money in your pocket that would have otherwise gone in the offering plate. You'd have some extra free time on your hands that would have otherwise been spent in worship. You would have some extra energy you could put into other tasks that otherwise would have been spent working for your congregation and serving the Lord. I guess you could go those things "gains." But what would you lose? What did Jesus say: "*What good is it for a man if to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?*" When you really think about those words, the question is not whether you can afford to be a member of this congregation. The question is whether you could afford not to be a member of this congregation.

The answer to that question becomes clear when we think of the benefits of being one of this church. You simply cannot put a price tag on the peace of mind that comes from hearing your sins are forgiven for the sake of Jesus. You cannot put a price tag on the encouragement you receive from the Word and from your brothers and sisters in Christ when you are struggling with difficult times in life. You cannot put a price tag on the joy you receive by serving the Lord and helping others who are in need of your service. We can never take for granted the blessings that are ours as followers of Jesus and redeemed children of God.

Yes, the cost is high. Following Jesus means denying yourself and taking up your cross for his sake. But as we contemplate the price he paid for our salvation, his sacrifice gives us hearts that are willing to pay any price for him. May we each be to say in the words of the hymn we just sang, “Lord, you I love with all my heart.” And may we show this love in live of service dedicated to the One who gave himself for us. **Amen.**

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Sermon No. 318  
March 8, 2009  
Pastor Steven Hahm  
pastor@crossofglorylutheran.com