

February 25 Lent 2B

Introduction to the themes for the second Sunday in Lent: Jesus is quite blunt with those who would follow him. Full disclosure...He knows that because of who he is and what he's about political regimes, some religious coalitions, and even his own followers will resist...violently even. Jesus is equally forthright in saying he will rise from the dead and God's love becomes the final and lasting word. Lent means leaning into the realities of both the cross and the resurrection at the same time.

Gospel Reading: Mark 8:31-38

31 Then 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. 32 He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 But 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."

34 He 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. 35 For 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. 36 For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? 37 Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? 38 Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

SERMON

You heard read one of the most misused portions of scripture...taking up the cross. It's beyond sad that some have twisted Jesus' meaning to justify the suffering that comes with just being human...or suffering humans inflict on each other. In the

way that some churches bury the word “alleluia” during Lent, I wish we could bury the harmful interpretation of that phrase take up the cross and never dig it up again.

What IS Jesus saying? He says that it is inevitable that he and the rule of God he proclaims will meet with violent resistance. Remember he ALSO says not even death stops God’s loving agenda to restore all things.

In our chaotic world and in churches trying to cope Jesus has words for us too. The resurrection is for us. We might have to let go of some things that we think are the core of our identity whether that be ways of governing, buildings, staffing models or even what we believe church to be about.

Some of you have enjoyed the idea of the Texas use of the inclusive phrase “all y’all” —Jesus words about losing and finding are spoken to all y’all. The words apply to us each individually and to an entire faith community.

I don’t have all answers about what we lose and what we find—so here’s a story about a neighbouring congregation I visited this week. You might know that St. Andrews Presbyterian in Welland hosts a weekly coffee and conversation meet up for folk who live on the streets and in other very precarious housing arrangements.

The decision to offer the program was difficult and risky. One of the hosts shared with me the question that tipped the scales in favour of stepping out in faith and stepping up for the sake of the neighbour: Here’s the question: “Who are we if we are only here for ourselves and not for our neighbours?”

As we hear Jesus’ words about finding and losing our lives, the perfect question to ask ourselves...”For whose sake are we here”?