

## 17 Pentecost B

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Psalms 116:1-9

James 3:1-12

Mark 8:27-38

**Rev. Trish Schmermund**

Holy Spirit Lutheran Church, Edmonton

September 16, 2018

---

Wow! What a striking statement Jesus makes this morning! I'm going to guess that every single one of us in this room wonders how it is that Jesus could say such a thing to one of his *beloved* disciples.

If we met someone who was having a bad day, for whom things just weren't going their way, we would pull out our mental health first aid and wonder if they are depressed or feeling down. We might even ask them if they are feeling suicidal! And if they were *just* having a bad day –how perfectly natural to offer a word of encouragement! If they were feeling that they were going to harm themselves we'd want to do whatever we could to stop them! We would say, "No, don't let this get you down," "how could I help you," "I'm here for you."

This is Peter. We like Peter. He's like us. If someone is going to put their foot in their mouth, we know it will be him. He speaks from his heart, he speaks from his ignorance, he's like a child full of hope and eagerness. But more than all this, Peter is human. And we get that. So when we hear stories with Peter in it, like this one, we say, "I'd have probably said the same thing."

Peter's problem, and our own, is that we can never completely *get* this God. One of our confirmation students is a whiz at Rubik's Cubes. You remember those multi-colored blocks where you sort all the colors. I, at my best, can get one side (after much frustration!) One side. I just don't get the patterns of moving it all around, but this student? Not only can they solve the regular kind, they can solve huge, multi-sided versions that I wouldn't even attempt. Peter thinks he knows Jesus, but obviously he overestimated himself.

God is the great "I AM," a title she assumed when Moses first asked "who are you, what shall I call you?" God just said, "I AM."

Jesus isn't interested in being put into a box either. Names can do that. Peter calling Jesus a messiah meant that Peter was thinking of Jesus as a person ordained or anointed for leadership, power and authority. This is who they were waiting for in order to restore Israel and oust Rome from its throne.

We probably would describe “messiah” differently. Just think about that title for a moment, what do you think it means?

Whatever we think, Jesus’s response may well be, “you’re wrong.” And that is only because we know so little about this Holy One and in the absence of knowing we fill in the gaps with what we’d like.

So we make up sports gods that cheer for the Eskimos over the Stampeders. We imagine wrathful gods that swoop down and punish wayward cities with natural disasters. We can’t explain suffering, so some say there is no god. When someone dies we’re angry and say “why?”

Peter too had to learn that God was not whom he wanted. God wasn’t only about feeding 5000 people or healing lepers or teaching in the Synagogue. God wasn’t a warrior to defeat Rome. God wasn’t the messiah in the way that Peter expected.

(By the way, when we make up attributes for God, it’s called idolatry. Just like if someone were saying something untrue about you, God doesn’t like it.)

I AM, says God. I AM who I AM.

That’s why we’re called to *follow*. God’s not looking for a team or a partner or a replacement. God is interested in growing a beloved community.

To accomplish this, Jesus sets the bar high and demonstrates an unwavering commitment to love. This is what eventually leads Jesus to stand before Pilate. Love is an incredibly powerful force. It has power, not to defeat, but to change.

Leaders can be defeated. Powerful countries can be overtaken. Royalty will die. Tables turn on worldly power all the time. It just depends who is bringing their “A” game to any given moment. Bullies in school hallways reign until someone is bigger than they are. Abusers continue to abuse as long as their secret is kept.

Jesus isn’t interested in shaming people into change or bullying powerful leaders, or even humbling us into submission by exercising the power he might. Instead, he chose love that wouldn’t bend or end or fade away because Christ knew this was the only way to grow us into something new. We all know that when hearts are changed the world is a different place.

By Christ's example then, we too take up our cross and follow. This isn't about small things like giving up something for Lent. It's not about scraping together a few extra dollars for an offering. It's not about coming to church if you have time. It's not about thinking we're being a "good Christian" because one time we gave to the poor.

Think about it. The cross is an instrument of political torture and oppression. It was used by Rome to make a submissive nation, a people in fear afraid to challenge the powers that be. Jesus, took that horrific practice and redeemed it. By not relenting on love, even in the face of crucifixion, the cross became a meaningful call to a different way of living. Eventually, Rome gave up on the practice of crucifixion, because it had lost its ability to strike fear into anyone.

"Take up your cross" isn't a self-help program. It's about living God's word without compromise, through rejection, misunderstanding, teasing, or name-calling or anything else that isn't love.

"Take up your cross" is a call for us to never relinquish our hope in love being the most powerful weapon at our disposal and the only healing balm for a broken world. With it we do not defeat our enemies, but we win them over to become one with Christ as a beloved community.

Thanks be to God.