

### The Cross. Wear It, and Carry It!

*<sup>31</sup> Then he began to teach them that it was necessary for the Son of Man to suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and rise after three days. <sup>32</sup> He spoke openly about this. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup> But turning around and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! You are not thinking about God's concerns but human concerns."*

*<sup>34</sup> Calling the crowd along with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, 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 because of me and the gospel will save it. <sup>36</sup> For what does it benefit someone to gain the whole world and yet lose his life? <sup>37</sup> What can anyone give in exchange for his life? <sup>38</sup> For whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." (Christian Standard Bible Translation)*

Three or four years ago we purchased a bunch of these cross pins. We put them in the narthex and asked you to take one or more with you. You can attach it to your lapel or hat or purse strap or just about anything. On the cross is a scroll with the words, "Paid in Full." These words were spoken by Jesus on the cross. Yes, most translations say, "It is finished," but that is what it means, paid in full. Our sins are paid in full by Christ. These words really explain the cross and why it is so dear to us. Hopefully people have seen these crosses on you. Hopefully they asked you, "What does that mean?" and you told them. We suggest you even take it off and give it to them and pick up another one here at church.

You must be using them because we had to re-order them three or four or five times. That is good. We have more back there. Take one. Give them away. We can always order more.

Jesus speaks to us today in our gospel reading and he talks about crosses, too. But he doesn't tell us to just wear them. He encourages all of us to carry them.

#### *I. Jesus carried his cross.*

I have to give you a bit of context to our reading. The few verses before Jesus gave his disciples a pop quiz. He asked them who the people say he was. Some thought he was John the Baptist. Others thought he was Elijah. Others regarded as one of the prophets. All of these impressions or guesses were very complimentary. It is like describing a high school baseball player, "He is another Lou Gehrig or Derrick Jeter." People had a high opinion of Jesus.

But it wasn't high enough. It doesn't even come close. We can say all sorts of nice things of Jesus, but if we don't get who he really is, well, he will do us no good. So he asked his disciples who they thought he was, and Peter instantly chimed in, "You are the Christ." He got it. That is who Jesus is. But what does that mean? Jesus explains. "*<sup>31</sup> Then he began to teach them that it was necessary for the Son of Man to suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and rise after three days. <sup>32</sup> He spoke openly about this.*" No parables. No hidden messages. No code words. Jesus speaks in plain words. In order to be the Christ, it is necessary that Jesus suffer many things. He must be rejected by the church of his day. Then he must be killed. But that is not all. He must also rise from the dead back to life. That sounds like the Apostles' Creed we use each week, doesn't it.

You would think the disciples would have fallen to their knees in praise to Christ. Here is their Savior. But that is not what Jesus got. "***Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.***" Peter did not want to hear it. He did not want a humiliated, dead Christ. Peter had seen so much already. He witnessed dozens of miracles performed by Jesus. He saw Jesus heal the lame and give sight to the blind, still storms and walk on water. That is the Christ Peter wanted. He saw Jesus raise people back from the dead. That is the Christ he wanted. Twice he saw Jesus feed thousands with only one sack lunch. That is the Christ he wanted. Jesus had sent his disciples out to preach in all the towns and villages, and to make the people take notice, he allowed his disciples to drive out demons. Peter went on that trip. Undoubtedly he drove out demons in the name of Jesus. That is the Christ he wanted.

But that is not the Christ he was getting. He wanted a glorious Christ who amazed crowds, gained respect and was powerful. He did not want a Christ who would suffer and die. Forget that he would rise from the dead. Peter didn't want a suffering Christ.

Who would? Do you? Do I? We want winners, not losers. I grew up in Michigan. I still have a soft spot for Michigan sports. You have to be a different person to root for Michigan teams. They tend to be bad. I remember seeing Lions games where the fans wore paper bags over their heads. Some held up signs saying, "When does hockey begin?" The Tigers haven't really scared anyone in a long time. Nor the Pistons. We want winners. Ask kids who their favorite quarterback is, and most will say Patrick Mahomes even if they are not Kansas City fans.

We want a winner Christ. We want a popular Christ. We want a Christ who feeds us, heals us, and makes life much better. If you or I had a chance to edit the Lord's Prayer, we would do it all differently. We would write, "Lead us not in poverty." We would write, "My will be done on earth" and drop the, "... as it is in heaven." We want a Christ who would make life easy,

carefree, full of plenty, with no trouble, and then watch our enemies crushed like ants. We want a winner Christ, not a suffering one.

***“But turning around and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! You are not thinking about God’s concerns but human concerns.””*** Jesus is telling us to look at things from his point of view, not ours. Our point of view involves this world, what we will eat or wear, what will happen tomorrow. But what does Jesus see? His concern is where we will live after the 80 or 90 years we spend here on earth. He sees we are helpless. He sees we are lost if he doesn’t do anything about it. As you heard earlier in our Romans reading, ***“... when we were powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ... While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*** (NIV 2011)

So the Christ we do not want is the Christ we need. Jesus came to suffer and die and rise again to save us from our sins. Again, as it said in the Romans reading, ***“... while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life.”*** He came to save his enemies. He came to save us. That is why we wear crosses and put crosses in our church and homes. Yes, he answers our prayers. He provides for our needs as he knows best. We live and breath because of his grace. But he gives us something what will never end. He came to save his enemies. He came to save us. That is why we wear crosses and put crosses in our churches and homes. Good. But he also tells us to pick up a cross and follow him.

*II. Now carry your cross.*

***<sup>34</sup> Calling the crowd along with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, 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 because of me and the gospel will save it. <sup>36</sup> For what does it benefit someone to gain the whole world and yet lose his life? <sup>37</sup> What can anyone give in exchange for his life? <sup>38</sup> For whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”***

Jesus tells us to deny ourselves. Deny. That means to say no. This means we question every thought we have and every desire we feel. So we deny what we normally think and feel and ask God in his Word to tell us what to do and say and feel. It also means we say no to the world and its way of life. All of us have ancestors who left the old country to come and settle here. They gave up their home, country, even families. We are members of God’s kingdom now. We accept that. We want that. So we are willing to leave everything else behind.

Next, he tells us to pick up our crosses and follow him. I found this interesting. Nowhere yet has Jesus said that he would be crucified. He did just tell them he must die, but he didn’t say how. Yet, he talks about the cross here. The people were familiar with crosses. The Persians seem to be the first to execute criminals by crucifixion. The Greeks seem to have learned that from the Persians, and the Romans picked it from them. The people knew of and witnessed crucifixions. Now crucifixion was a means of executing criminals. But he was more than that. If that is all they wanted to do was execute someone, they could give him some poison or cut off his head or something. Crucifixion was to also humiliate a person. It was reserved for the lowest of the low, the most heinous of criminals. It was saying they are under a curse or evil.

If you or I call Jesus Lord and Savior, people will look on with disdain as if we were crucified in Roman days. It is cool to wear crosses. Many do including many celebrities. But it is not so cool to live as Christians. I know of someone who was not hired because he believed in creation. I know of young ladies who broke off relationships with some fine gentlemen because they teased them about their faith. It is illegal to talk about Christ in parts of the world, and in many places in America. Christians are put to death for being Christians.

That is why Jesus speaks the way he does in this text. It is like you flying in an airplane and the pilot says, “We are going to experience some turbulence up ahead. So make sure your seat belts are fastened.” Jesus is taking us on the road to heaven, but there is turbulence ahead. The world is full of missionaries. They want to convert us back to their religion, their lifestyle, a Savior-less world. They will tell you to deny Christ and join them. They tell you to put down the cross and join them. That is why Jesus is animated here. Don’t deny him. Deny the world. Pick up that cross and follow.

***“<sup>36</sup> For what does it benefit someone to gain the whole world and yet lose his life? <sup>37</sup> What can anyone give in exchange for his life? <sup>38</sup> It is a simple cost analysis. Nothing in this world can compare with your soul. And there is nothing you can do or have that you can trade for your soul. Nothing compares to the salvation Christ has won for us. So by sternly telling us to deny ourselves and follow him with our own crosses, he is speaking in love. Don’t throw away the treasure he gives you.***

We have more of these “paid in full” pins in the back; take one or more. Let people see you wear them. But pray they see more than a cross on your lapel or shirt. May they see you follow him, even willing to carry a cross for him. Let them know you are not ashamed. Amen.