

“The Cost of Discipleship”

Mark 8: 27-38

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor

First Baptist Church

Frankfort, Kentucky

March 1, 2015

Communion Devotion

This morning our attention turns to one of the most ambitious challenges Jesus issued. “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” Mark 8:34b.

Let me be candid with you. I know of no text more difficult to preach than this one. Everything inside of me wants to argue with what Jesus said or dilute it to make it easier to swallow. This was true for Peter, the leader of the disciples, and I suspect it is true for most of you. Let me explain.

Our text opens with Jesus and the disciples traveling north to Caesarea Philippi, the land of many idols and shrines. On their way, Jesus asked his disciples what others were saying about him.

They informed him some people thought he was the reincarnation of John the Baptist, Elijah or another of the prophets. Jesus then asked who they thought he was, which caused Peter to blurt out, “You are the Messiah” Mark 8:29b.

After instructing the disciples to keep this information to themselves, Jesus proceeded to talk to them about suffering, being rejected by the religious leaders, dying and being vindicated by his resurrection.

Peter, who rarely had an opinion he thought he should keep to himself, took Jesus aside and rebuked him. Immediately, Jesus turned the table and rebuked Peter.

“Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men” Mark 8:33.

At this point, Jesus turned and included the crowd which had gathered around him and the disciples when he said, ““If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.

What good is it to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his own soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? 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" Mark 8:34-38.

In the gospels, the disciples were often confused by what Jesus said. He rarely responded to their questions with simple, direct answers and was fond of telling parables that were not easy to interpret.

This was not the case when Jesus talked about discipleship in the context of his own suffering and death. There was no confusion about what Jesus meant, just disagreement.

What Jesus said was perfectly clear to the disciples. They just didn't like it and immediately tried to change Jesus' mind.

How often do we try to negotiate with Jesus in the shadows as Peter did that day?

What have you and I said to him in our attempts to lower his expectations and demands?

Why do we do this? Self-denial is not a part of our culture's image of a good life and self-discipline requires hard work. Just look at this table before us to understand this.

Jesus was sent by God to show us how to live a life which truly reflected the heart and nature of God and to teach people how to live in peace and harmony with one another. To do this, he had to resist the culture's pull upon him to be indifferent to the needs of others so he could be more self-indulgent.

Every day Jesus faced the same temptations as the religious leaders around him to be more concerned about his own wellbeing than the welfare of those he was sent by God to serve. Most of his peers succumbed to those temptations and became addicted to power, prestige, attention and money. They were driven by selfishness and greed, and their lives in no way reflected the heart and nature of the God they claimed to worship and the God Jesus intimately knew.

Jesus was determined that neither he nor his disciples would follow in their footsteps. This was why he offered an alternative vision of discipleship and called for his disciples to exercise self-denial and self-discipline. Jesus was confident following his example would bring the best out of his followers and living by his values would lead to healthier communities, a better world for all people and a more accurate reflection of God's nature.

What, specifically, does Jesus want us to do as his modern day disciples? He wants us to say no to some things (deny ourselves) and yes to others (take up our cross) and follow him.

He wants us to say no to those things that are harmful to us or others, undermine our commitments and promises, keep us from achieving our potential and interfere with us going wherever he leads.

What are those things for you? What is bringing the worst out in you rather than the best? What is holding you back from following Jesus?

Is it an addiction, a negative attitude, a critical spirit, a bad temper or the need to control others?

Is it selfishness, greed, feelings of jealousy, a desire to seek revenge against those who hurt you or a fear which is controlling you?

Are you willing to identify it and deal with it? As Jesus' disciple, I don't think we have an option.

On the other hand, what do you need to say yes to at this time in your life? What cross or challenge do you need to embrace which would make you a better family member or neighbor, help you to be more Christ-like and enable you to achieve your potential?

Do you need to be more tolerant, patient, encouraging, unselfish and forgiving? Do you need to be a better listener and less judgmental?

Do you need to roll up your sleeves and get your hands dirty so you can help those around you who are struggling? Do you need to build bridges of understanding, goodwill and reconciliation instead of walls of suspicion and hate?

Whose help do you need to be this kind of person and disciple? This morning, begin by asking for God's help. He is the one who brought the best out in Jesus and enabled him to be faithful all the way to the cross. He is eager to do the same for you.

As we turn our focus to this table of remembrance now, I encourage you to begin this conversation.