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Mark 8:27-38
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The Shalom Cross

Good morning, Church. Today, we ask a philosophical question. What is the best way to live, following Jesus into danger or Peter's path of pacificity and/or violence? Spoilers: I will be taking Jesus's side, but these scriptures give us the opportunity to think deeply about martyrdom and shalom, the Hebrew word for peace.

I invite you to pray with me to prepare our heads and hearts. Lord my the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing to you. Our rock and salvation. Amen.

Take up your cross and follow me!

What a reckless statement, Jesus! Take up our crosses? Follow Jesus to Jerusalem and into death? Some other preachers may want to spiritualize this into an ethic of humility. Still, as I read this today, all I can see is Jesus telling his dear students to leave safety and risk a martyr's death with Jesus.

Get behind me, Peter, and follow me to the cross.

Today, Jesus turns his head to Jerusalem and turns his body toward danger. On one hand, we know at the end of this story that Jesus is willingly going to his death and, after three days, will rise again. But let us not rush to Easter. Let us dwell in the fear of Peter. While Jesus rebukes Peter, I've got to admit that it is so easy to be like Peter, to shout out to Jesus, no, don't go to Jerusalem. Jesus is supposed to be the Messiah, the anointed one, who will be the salvation for many in Israel. And I'm intentionally using that charged word, salvation, to apply to that dream of political independence in Jesus's day. Perhaps Peter even hopes that Jesus will spark a rebellion and use violence to force out the Roman Empire. This guess comes from Peter drawing his sword to violently protect Jesus during his arrest.

But Jesus is willingly going to the cross.

We're not prepared for Jesus to leave us. And as we sit warm and secure in our pews and couches at home. Why did Jesus give this terrifying challenge for us to take up our own crosses and follow you into danger ourselves? We are not used to martyrdom today. There is MJ Sharp, who was murdered in 2017 doing peace work in the

Democratic Republic of Congo. Or maybe since it is black history month, you'd think about Rev Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. You may also think about Oscar Romero from El Salvador and Dietrich Bonhoeffer from Nazi Germany.

But as I think about all those people, as I think about Jesus. I do not see recklessness, I see people who chose life. Heroes who worked hard for the sake of millions of lives, our lives mean little in the face of such tragedy—people who lived in times and places where human life was worth very little. Hiding would mean letting these horrible circumstances happen. It is better to love one another like the Huguenots, French Protestants who rescued thousands of Jews and non-Jews from Nazi-occupied France. It is better to live fully alive and authentically because we are all mortal, and worrying will not add an hour to our lives. The martyr and saint who risks to save others is following in the way of the shalom cross, the cross that saves.

Take up your cross. Follow me into abundant life!

I am leaning on Job here. Job was a righteous man who followed the law and the prophets, caring for the poor, widows, orphans, strangers and all the other people the Hebrew Scriptures say that we should care about. He thought that by living a righteous life, he could live comfortably into his old age. But the world is more complex than this; bad things happen to good people. Jesus was the Messiah, but he still went to the cross. And maybe that is the point of the paradox, “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.”

I hope that many of you already have life experience of my point. Life is chaotic and we do not know the measure of our years. And while it is true that we should not be loose with our lives, it is wise to look both ways before crossing the street. We are not God. No amount of carefulness or money or guns can save us. Better to work for the sake of the gospel and a better world for your children and grandchildren.

This passage is dramatic. When I read, deny yourself and follow me. I see the call to live authentically and, indeed, yourself. To live the life that God is calling you into. To be truly human. Each of you needs to discern for yourselves what this means.

Be a follower of love,
and join the fishermen and the sinners,
the women and the children,
the sick and the poor,
the needy and the hopeful:

called to be fully alive in this world,
called to be the hands and feet of heaven,
called to be all we can be,
called to follow.

This is our vocation. Let us respond with number 547.