

Third Sunday After Pentecost

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

Rev. Jason Glombicki

June 25th, 2017

Today's gospel reading picks up where last week's left off. To understand what's happening today, we need to recall that Jesus spoke about rejection. It's helpful for us to feel that rejection. Take a moment to think of a time when you were rejected. In romantic relationships, it could be after a first date or decades of marriage. In our careers, we might not get that promotion or the job offer. We can be rejected from higher education, an offer on a home, or because of our identity.

On this Sunday, when some march in the Pride Parade and this church celebrates our "Reconciling in Christ" status, I cannot help but think of the rejection of many lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer, intersex, and asexual individuals. Families, friends, governments, and churches have rejected, discriminated, and criminalized these sexual minorities. In 74 out of 196 countries it is still a criminal offense to have same-sex sexual contact. In 13 of those countries simply being gay or bisexual is punishable by death.<sup>1</sup> Not that long ago that was the case in the United States. In the 1960's it was a felony in all U.S. states to be gay. LGBTQ individuals were often imprisoned, hunted, beaten, shot, and strangled. Still today, many legal protections in the U.S. do not exist.

In the midst of rejection, Jesus speaks a word today. At first glance Jesus' words do not appear comforting. In fact, he said, "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." If we take it at face value, we'd get fake news quite literally. The intent of fake news is to mislead with the

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/gay-lesbian-bisexual-relationships-illegal-in-74-countries-a7033666.html>

intention of gaining power and causing chaos. Yet, if we look at Jesus' life, he has never been about the misuse of power or the creation of chaos. In fact, it's quite the opposite. Jesus blessed the poor and marginalized. He worked to bring truth, peace, and justice. However, these efforts were quite divisive.

You see, God's message of peace divides; there is money to be made off of violence and, therefore, people will disagree about peace. Jesus' message of love divides. For, love is patient and kind. Love is not self-serving. Love does not boast. Yet, our capitalistic society rewards aggressive and self-centered grandstanders. Jesus' message of justice divides. People who want privileges that control others will sneer at mention of equity. So, you see, when it comes down to it, Jesus' teachings were divisive. Jesus did not engage for the sake of division, but division was a byproduct of enacting God's vision in the world.

If we take seriously Jesus' command to become his disciple by learning and enacting his teachings, then we will stumble across disagreement. When we work to love all people, others will disagree and walk away. When we strive for justice and peace, some will respond with violence and complaints. Our gracious response might be labeled as soft and ineffective. While our intention is not to divide, there will be, as one theologian puts it, "exceptional circumstances when integrity is more important than even our most cherished familial relationships. Following Jesus...will, at times, require being more committed to truth-telling than keeping friendships."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <http://leftbehindandlovingit.blogspot.com/2014/06/a-difficult-text-for-difficult-crises.html>

But, what does the look like in everyday life? Well, in verse 38 we are called to take up the cross and follow Jesus. That does not literally mean that you need to find a cross and walk around Chicago with it. Instead, it requires us to realize that those who were being crucified were outsiders. You would not see a male Roman citizen be brutally crucified. Instead, slaves, enemies of the state, terrorists, foreigners, and other marginalized individuals were the ones who were crucified. So, “to take up the cross” means stepping into the margins with those who are rejected. You see, when protesters gathered to shout “no more hunting gays” at the Stonewall Uprising, they took up the cross. When this congregation risked losing members in 2006 by declaring that all sexual orientations and gender identities are welcomed here, those members took up the cross. So too, when we accompany the suffering poor, we take up the cross. When we work for ecological justice by changing our behaviors, we take up the cross. When we use our privilege to contact our government leaders about immigration, racial justice, prison reform, violence, and healthcare, we take up the cross. We take up the cross every time we align our words and actions with a deep commitment to God’s truth, justice, peace, love, and grace, even where it might divide us.

That is hard work. But, we are not left with responsibility for dragging the cross without a gracious promise. Like Audry, in our baptisms we were promised that there is nothing to fear. In today’s Gospel Jesus reminds us that God has an intimate concern for our lives down to the hairs on our chiny, chin, chin. That is both a comfort and claim. This claim of intimacy reminds us that although our work might divide, it is also eclipsed by our ultimate focus. Our focus is “to take up the cross” so that we might partner with God to transform and liberate a broken world, and everything else is beyond our scope.

This shift to a cross-centered life is difficult for some of us. It makes me uneasy at times. When I get anxious, I like to stop and look up in the trees. In that tree, I’m looking for a bird.

While I couldn't spot a sparrow if I tried, I can recognize a pigeon. I like to think of pigeons as our equivalent to the sparrow Jesus mentioned. You see, the sparrow was the cheapest of birds. They were so cheap that you would buy one for a penny and get one free – BOGO at its finest! Jesus reminded us that God cares for that BOGO bird, and that God cares even more about you and me. We're not BOGO's, but rather we are all children of God. Each of us are products of God's existence. We are made of divine material. And with these God-given bodies, we are liberated from the rat-race of life; released so that we might freely take up the cross.

What a true gift that is for us. Although rejection may follow, we are focused on God's call to "carry the cross" - to work for justice, to strive for peace, and to love without ending. And the rest of it, is strictly for the birds. Have no fear. Amen.