

Bethel Anglican Church
St. John's Street on the Point
St. John's, Antigua
The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost:
Proper 19 (B)
September 12, 2021
A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish

“Planting the cross firmly”
The Holy Gospel according to
Mark 8:27-38

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people

say that I am?" And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?"

Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah."

And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him. Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me,

Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 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. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he

comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One, Have mercy upon us. Amen.

The Menninger Foundation undertook a study that suggested the average person was looking for three things, three things:

(1) one, a sense of community, belonging. In the Christian Church we belong to Christ and are brothers and sisters who belong to each other.

(2) Two, people are looking for substance, something definitive to hold on

to, to believe. The earliest confession of faith was simply, "Jesus is Lord." That is not so simple because it says Jesus bears the title given by Jews to Almighty God, "Adonai," Lord. It means that because Jesus is Lord, it is not Caesar or self. Christians are Jesus' people first and foremost even if it leads to the cross.

(3) And third, people are looking for guidance in life. I am not so sure Christianity is offering what it once did in the sense of how to live one's life to the fullest, how to have a happy marriage and family, productive work life, how to deal with life's stresses, how to cope with illness

and loss, but these topics are at the top of many church agendas as our society in general continues to seem to unravel, sorry to say.

<http://www.lectionary.org/Sermons/NT/02-Mark/Mark-08.31-38-AshamedOfJesus-Kegel.htm>

Community, substance, guidance—three things we the church offer.

Evangelist Billy Graham commented that when Jesus said, “If you are going to follow me, you have to take up a cross, it was the same as saying, ‘Come and bring your

electric chair with you.’ Or ‘Take up the gas chamber and follow me.’ He did not have a beautiful gold cross in mind--the cross on a church steeple or on the front of our Bible. Jesus had in mind a place of execution.”

<SermonWriter: Sept. 13, 2015 (Proper 19 - OT 24) Mark 8:27-38>

After 9-11-01 I was living in New York and upon direction from my Bishop, I volunteered first as a hospital chaplain at the Trauma One St. Vincent de Pauls Hospital. Then after all my patients were released, I volunteered for the recovery efforts down at Ground Zero which previously I had passed

every day on the way to my church in New Jersey. It was a very dusty and somewhat odorous job blessing whatever the firefighters brought to our temporary morgue. One of the construction workers at the site found a large cross that had been discovered in the rubble that was about ten feet high and six feet across where steel girders had broken apart in the shape of a cross. This big cross was hoisted up the top of the rubble where it stood for the nine months of the recovery effort. And many looked to that cross as a symbol of peace and unity even though dozens of religions were represented in those lives which were

lost that fateful day. That cross is now in the underground memorial museum at that site.

The cross is not pretty, it is pretty rough, but the ‘real cross’ was probably a rough hewn tree, not the nice pieces of lumber we often see displayed on Easter. And on that cross the hope of humanity was crucified. But by the grace of God, Jesus was raised from the dead to live with us forever as the Risen Christ.

The Cross of Christ that the Church uses is the universal symbol for Christianity, to show where we have established our

presence, to announce our world-wide efforts in the recovery from sin and death; and where we hoist our church's Cross becomes the place where we cast our lots for future generations to find a place of solace, healing, and Christian growth. We are here today at a location which was established by our faithful foremothers and our diligent forefathers as a place of respite from the injustices and stresses and strains of our society past and present. They established this church and others as places where the Kingdom of God had a modicum of reality, where Christ is king, president, governor, mayor, priest, Lord, and Savior--a place

where we proclaim justice and peace and equality and friendship and the all-healing presence of Christ Jesus' merciful love.

This is no ordinary "plus-sign" we sit in front of and behind and under. This is the amazing Cross of grace and truth and courage.

Christ was not calling us to become footstools or carpets or concrete walkways or asphalt roads for others to run all over us. No, Christ wants us to take up our cross, to plant it high and firm, to exalt him who died upon it as our Lord and our Master. Amen?!

Pastor Calvin Miller wrote, "God does not lavish his children with a jolly

discipleship so that they may swim in spiritual ecstasy between conversion and death. God is a giver, but God does not [necessarily] give [blissfulness], [instead] God gives redemption, meaning, security, love, victory, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. And [when we have done our best and have shined with God's brightness,] happiness and fulfillment is our response to God's [generous] gifts.

In the last paragraph of his great book entitled "Mere Christianity", C.S. Lewis has these important lines: "[This] principle runs through all life, from top to bottom," Lewis

says: "Give up yourself and you will find your real self. Lose life and it will be saved. Submit to death--the death of ambitions and secret wishes. Keep nothing back. Nothing in us that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for Christ," says C.S. Lewis, "and you will find him, and with him, ...everything else thrown in."

Keep nothing back. Look for Christ and you will find him, and with him, we will find everything else thrown in.

Lutheran Pastor Peter Marley wrote, "I don't know about you, but I have found in

my own life that sometimes I am more comfortable talking about Jesus than expressing some wild and passionate devotion to him. I think I'm holding nothing back, and then I realize that caring about Jesus with the insight of my mind or through the books on my shelf is not the same as giving over the full allegiance of my life. It's a little bit like the difference between talking about a loved one and actually picking up the phone and telling a person you really love them.

[http://day1.org/1008-christ and everything else thrown in](http://day1.org/1008-christ_and_everything_else_thrown_in)

The Rev. J. C. Austin, director of the Center for Christian Leadership at Auburn Theological Seminary in New York, NY, wrote, “I have been told that at the height of the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, when Christians were literally suffering and dying for justice and redemption there, Archbishop Desmond Tutu used to gather his staff around him in the mornings for prayer. And often as he was closing, he would ask, ‘If being Christian became a crime, would there be enough evidence to convict us?’ [Repeat:] ‘If being Christian became a crime, would there be enough evidence to convict us?’ Now the first time

I heard that story I was horrified: if there's not enough evidence to convict Desmond Tutu of being a Christian, God help us all! But now I think he was asking [that question] to keep himself and his staff focused on who and whose they were, rather than [on] just what they were doing. They were not simply leaders, leading an important social struggle for dignity and freedom; they were followers, following Jesus Christ in insisting that God's reconciling love transcends anything that tries to resist it, which apartheid challenged in insisting that different races could not and should not live together. Without being

followers [of Christ], being leaders was not enough; people had to be able to see and hear them following Christ in their lives and ministry for that leadership to really make sense in the first place.”

http://day1.org/4048-following_jesus_is_for_losers

St. Francis of Assisi said; “It is in giving that we receive. It is in dying that we are born to a new and living hope.” Jesus said, “He who loses his life will find it.”

I would like to suggest to you today that Christianity is the great invitation to live as

Christ lived, to love as Christ loved. And there is no greater love than this than a person lay down his life for his friend.

Christianity is that great invitation to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Christ.

http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series_b_brrr_the_water_is_cold.htm

Pastor Edward F. Markquart, Grace Lutheran Church, Seattle, Washington, told this story: “We were on the seventh grade retreat. One of the most wonderful [characteristics] about seventh graders is that they tell you everything. One [quality]

about seventh graders is that they haven't learned to cover up the bases, cover up the truth of their families. Seventh graders often tell too much and are too honest about their families from their parents' points of view. I asked the seventh graders on that retreat: "Who are the people who really shaped your life? Who are the people who really shaped your life as a Christian?" Yes, the kids talked about their parents. But what I was surprised to hear mentioned so often was their grandpas and grandmas. I started to think of all the grandmas and grandpas who have had a significant impact on their grandchildren. In particular, I am thinking of

a particular grandmother in our church who took in an eighth grade grandson. I mean, she didn't have to, yet she had to. The kid had no place else to go. Now the young boy has become a young man and grandma has had this "boy become a man" now for about six years. It wasn't very easy for this grandmother. She didn't say, "I am looking for something to do. I think I will take in this eighth grader for the next five or six years. Grandma took in this boy and she did a real good job. As I look at that woman's life, she is an example of what it means to deny yourself, pick up your cross and follow me. This grandma denied herself plenty.

She took up the cross and carried the burden of her grandson who wasn't a cross but a grandson. Today, as I look across our congregation, I see so many grandparents who are doing the same thing, especially in this single parent society in which we live.

http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series_a_peter_the_stumbling_block.htm

The great twentieth century theologian, Paul Tillich, said: “The Christ had to suffer and die, because whenever the Divine appears in all Its depth, it cannot be endured by men. [The Divine] must be pushed away by the political powers, the religious

authorities, and the bearers of cultural tradition. In the picture of the Crucified, we look at the rejection of the Divine by humanity. We see that, in this rejection, not the lowest, but the highest representatives of mankind are judged. Whenever the Divine appears, it is a radical attack on everything that [man thinks] is good in man, and therefore man must repel it, must push it away, must crucify it. Whenever the Divine manifests Itself as the new reality, it must be rejected by the representatives of the old reality. For the Divine does not complete the human; it revolts against the human. Because of that, the human must defend

itself against it, must reject it, and must try to destroy it.

Yet when the Divine is rejected, it takes the rejection upon Itself. It accepts our crucifixion, our pushing away, the defense of ourselves against it. It accepts our refusal to accept, and thus conquers us. That is the centre of the mystery of the Christ. Let us try to imagine a [different sort of] Christ Who would not die, and Who would come in glory to impose upon us His power, His wisdom, His morality, and His piety. [This alter-Christ] would be able to break our resistance by His strength, by His wonderful government, by His infallible wisdom, and

by His irresistible perfection. But [such an overpowering Christ] would not be able to win our hearts. He would bring a new law, and would impose it upon us by His all-powerful and all-perfect Personality. His power would break our freedom; His glory would overwhelm us like a burning, blinding sun; our very humanity would be swallowed in His Divinity. One of [Martin] Luther's most profound insights was that God made Himself small for us in Christ. In so doing, [Christ] left us our freedom and our humanity. [Jesus] showed us His Heart, so that our hearts could be won.”

<http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=378&C=8>
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Community, substance, and guidance in life are what our neighbors are hungering and thirsting for. Only under the banner of the Cross of Christ can anyone find in a complete package those three things they long for. Let us take up our cross, lift our Cross high, plant it firmly, and go forward into our world with the certain ultimate answers that Christ by his death and resurrection has given us all.

Amen. Alleluia.

Description: The Cross of Christ is a symbol of peace, justice and love. As we take up our cross and show the loving way of Christ, we too are participating in the life of the Risen Christ.

Tags: Cross, unity, peace, 9-11, rough-hewn, grandmothers, grandfathers, church, symbol, agenda, love, community, substance, and guidance