

Lectionary 22 A 2017  
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St. Matthew's Kellers Church  
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Grace, mercy, and peace to you, from our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen

The Jesus this week is a lot less fun than the Jesus from last week. Last week Jesus asked, “who do you say that I am?” And, “thanks, Peter, for saying such nice things about me.” This week, Jesus reprimanded, “get behind me, Satan!” and “take up your cross and follow me.” This is not nearly so attractive, Jesus. It is not a good bargain, not a good deal. Did I really sign up for this?

Jesus says, take up your cross and follow me

Now, the cross is not the way of prosperity or happiness the cross is not the way to gain the very best of the material world the cross is the way of death it promises suffering, not luxury

Jesus doesn't command us to follow him to financial wealth and material riches. Jesus commands us to follow him as we carry our cross. Our own cross. The cross, a device of death. This taking up our cross and following Jesus carries with it certain implications. It requires deliberation/discernment. Wondering. Pondering, like Mary pondered in her heart what her son Jesus was about. Mary had to shift her expectations about her son, Jesus. So did Jesus' disciples. To them, Jesus' words in today's gospel must have shaken their expectations like an earthquake. Or a great flood, washing away everything familiar. What do we expect of Jesus, who seems to keep on surprising us, as he did the disciples? Last Sunday we learned that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. Right after that, Jesus spoke these words: suffer, be killed, then raised. [sigh] I don't want to suffer. And, supposing I did agree to suffer with Jesus, like Jesus, how can suffering and death lead to being raised? We wonder, doesn't God desire goodness for us, God's creatures? If so, why does Jesus invite us to take up a cross? There seems to be a disconnect here. It is not fair. I have to agree with Simon Peter's protests; there is something very wrong about that – God *should* forbid it! But our God has never been about perfect fairness.

About 600 years before Jesus walked the roads of the Holy Land, Jeremiah was God's prophet walking those same roads. As Jeremiah points out in the first reading for today, the way he has been treated is not fair. Jeremiah is brutally honest with God. The prophet lets loose with his anger at God. “On your account I suffered insult. Under the weight of your hand I sat alone, for you had filled me with indignation. You are to me like a deceitful brook.” God doesn't seem to care that what has happened to Jeremiah was not fair. Tough, God says. Deal with it. You are mine. I have called you to do as I say. To utter precious words of challenge and pain; not worthless pablum, like “God only wants you to be happy. Spend all your money on yourself, so you will be happy.” That is part of the prosperity “gospel” you might hear from Joel Osteen. Joel Osteen, the megachurch and TV pastor based in Houston, who didn't open his dry, arena-sized church to his flooded neighbors until shamed by public outcry. Thankfully, there are still some in the public who recognize what a true follower of Jesus does: carries a cross. Sacrifices one's belongings to help others. Like the owner of the Houston mattress business who welcomed flood refugees to his warehouse and stores to live and sleep on his inventory. *That* is taking up your cross and following Jesus. That is following God's word of extending hospitality to strangers. God's precious words are like God's precious Word, Jesus: caring, but at a very real cost. Jesus doesn't call us to happiness that there is no

pain. Jesus acknowledges pain, but reminds us that we can have joy at the presence of God in the midst of pain.

Like the Dread Pirate Roberts says in “The Princess Bride” movie: “Life is pain, Princess; whoever tells you otherwise is trying to sell you something.” Jesus is not selling anything to these disciples, or to us. Following Jesus is neither fair, nor easy. It will lead to great reward – but first we will go through fire swamps – that is, pain and obstacles of our own and others’ making. God’s economy is not fair. What would look like a fair economy? This for that. You work, you get something; I work, I get something. But even the world’s economy is not fair. Some people work really hard -- and get very little. Others work very little, and have a huge amount.

In God's economy: it doesn't matter who works. All will suffer. All will receive grace. The gift is in recognizing that God is with us in the suffering as well as in the grace. The gift is in recognizing that God loves, no matter what. God loves the sinner and God loves the sinner. Is it fair that God loves sinners? Well, I think it is right and salutary that God should love and forgive ME when I sin. I am quite good with that. But I don't think it is so fair that God loves and forgives people I don't like. I do not think it is fair that God loves and forgives, for instance, ISIS. Or racists. Or rapists. But God forgives more thoroughly than even I can hate. And God calls on me to love, to place on my own shoulders the heavy weight of forgiving even my enemies. Of giving up my advantage for another’s good.

Jesus calls on all who would be his disciples to take up their crosses and follow him. Follow him  
to a new way of being

Follow him            in community

Follow him            caring for people the world doesn't care for

Follow him            caring for people we might not care for.

It is a strange economy – for God to say that what we count as worthless, God counts as precious. Yet that is where God calls us to live, to be, and to follow.

Amen