

MESSAGE – The Case for Lent
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Would you like to have been there? With Peter, James and John?
To witness Jesus – changed. Glorified.
Things would certainly have been clearer.
Cemented that you were following the right rabbi!

Would you have wanted to be there?
Where it was probably easier....where struggles and doubts faded in the light.

Especially if you would have just heard earlier that week Jesus say something that was hard It's more comfortable to have been in that place...so I can understand Peter's reaction seeking to stay:

Lord it is good for us to be here!
Let's set up camp!
Let's stay.

You see, because prior to this....6 days prior – Jesus had said something hard to accept. Hard to understand. And in that teaching, Peter had gotten schooled by Jesus in front of everyone. So I can especially understand him preferring the escape that the mountaintop offered.

What was Peter escaping on the mountaintop? Let's listen to what Jesus says:

Remember this story happens 6 days before the mountaintop

Mark 8:31-38

³¹ He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. ³² He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

³³ But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human

concerns.” ³⁴ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? ³⁷ Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ³⁸ If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.”

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I mean, What part of any of that was easy?

Not the information of Jesus’ impending suffering and death

Not the rebuke Peter gave to Jesus...

Not the rebuke Jesus gave back to Peter....

And certainly not the requirements for being Jesus’ disciple:

Denying yourself?

Carrying a cross?

Follow Jesus to the cross?

Maybe Peter’s reactions in both of these stories (“it is good to be here!” and “this must not happen!”) speak to our human desire for things to be easy.

And I wonder: are we like Peter, trying to make the Christian faith too easy?

Maybe we are when:

- Focusing on the way of salvation to believe Jesus as Lord - while letting go of the first part: “repent and believe”
- Focusing on Jesus’ love “for me” – which of course is great - while forgetting that Jesus loves my enemy with the same love he has for me
- Focusing on God answering my prayers in the way I want him to without any action on my part.....*I personally can attest to this in my faith story.....*

Or how we make the Christian faith too easy by skipping over the holy week services of Holy Thursday – the last supper and Good Friday – remembering Jesus’ crucifixion and jump from Palm Sunday (Hosannah!) to Easter Sunday (He is Risen!)

Yes, perhaps we tend to skip over the hard stuff like Peter tried. But if we do we miss something absolutely vital to the faith:

- When you give yourself up
- When you are willing to set yourself aside for the kingdom
- When you die to your own wants and desires and agendas

Then something new can be born.

As Jesus said: "Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." – John 12:24

This is why observing the season of Lent is such a good idea.

It's 40 days....a significant length of time in which God acts and we respond

Lent calls us to the serious but difficult spiritual disciplines of introspection, repentance, confession, self-denial.

Lent calls us to look upon Jesus on the cross – who died there for our sins which is the only way we can truly begin to grasp the glory of his resurrection!

Its so important to journey through Lent each year because we just may be forgetful.

Those disciples long ago did....

Later on down the road in the story...

They were looking to share in Jesus' glory...James and John asked Jesus to grant them the places of honor: to sit at his right and left side in his kingdom....

And Jesus asked them: *are you able to drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?*

It seems he wanted to know if they were willing to go through the hard stuff which leads to glory. Or were they just wanting to skip it over.

They replied, "We are able."

Exactly what we sung earlier....

Lord we are able. Our spirits are thine. Remold us      make us, like thee divine.

If you are serious about what we sung, then I urge you:

Come to Ash Wednesday service this week.

And commit yourself to observe a holy Lent.

Let us pray:

Lord we sang that we are able. But we confess that we are not able, certainly not like you are! And certainly not without your grace at work within us. So please send your Spirit and hone us as your disciples so that our lives give you glory. Amen.