

Church of Our Saviour

Fond du Lac, Wisconsin

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The Second Sunday in Lent

February 28, 2021

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Text: Mark 8:31-38

Title: "If Any Want to Become My Followers"

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***In the Name of (+) Jesus our Lord. Amen***

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When Yakov Smirnoff, a Russian comedian, first came to our country, he was not prepared for the incredible array of

instant products on American grocery store shelves! He saw powdered milk! You just add water! He saw powdered orange juice! You just add water! He saw baby powder and I thought to myself, what a country!

Nothing instant about being a disciple of Jesus, a follower of Jesus! Nothing instant about that! Disciples of Jesus, followers of Jesus, are slowly raised through many trials and sufferings and temptations! Only a small percent of church-going teen-agers have a well-developed faith! And among church-going adults the number of those who have a well-developed faith doesn't rise by much!

That should concern us! It takes more than just time to develop the kind of faith we should have! It takes more than just joining a congregation and maybe signing the

congregation's constitution! We need to learn! We need to train! We need to try! And then we need to try harder! It may take suffering! It may take dying!

Rebuke, is hardly a word in our time! It's rarely used! It's an old word! It means, reprimand, censure, scold, lecture! It is the word, rebuke, used by the gospel writer, Mark, to describe what took place between Jesus and Peter! It was hardly happy talk!

For Peter, and too often for us, what we call the kingdom of God, comes to us quickly, no fuss, no strain, no test! It comes to us gently! For Peter, like too often for us, the rule of God, the kingdom of God comes to us with little demand, with little sacrifice! Peter believed, like too many of us, the rule of God,

the kingdom of God, is the quick way to happiness and well-being, even wealth! God has other thoughts!

New Testament scholar N.T. Wright, writes, “You are never far from the wilderness when you are in the promised land!”  
Never far from the wilderness when faith is tested! Never far from the wilderness of unexpected illness! Never far from unexpected loneliness! Never far from the wilderness where answers, any answer, does not come! And the anxiety keeps on growing!”

Remember the story of Randy Pausch, sailing along in life, a successful academic, a teacher, a high-tech researcher, a loving bond between him and his wife and three children, when out of the blue he received the devastating news he had a few months to live!

He decided not to escape the full reality of his disease! He shared his story with his students with great honesty! And he decided to write a book! The book was entitled, THE LAST LECTURE! He wrote the book principally for his young and infant children! I read the book! Along with many others! The book was best seller! The book hit hard! I couldn't put it down! Here was a person, Randy, who decided to be what he was, husband, father, doctor, and a man facing death! How do you make that look neat?

Peter had to be corrected! As anyone who believes life and faith is never-ending fun and games should be corrected, too! Faith is more! Faith is test!

And that's what a hymn, a brave hymn in our hymnals, tells us! It's title is, WHAT GOD ORDAINS IS GOOD INDEED! It was written in sixteen forty-nine, when life was truly hard! The hymn says what Peter and believers like us need to grasp!

In the recent and very painful experiences we are living through in our country, the pandemic, logic impossible to follow, leaders stuck in their own political philosophies, hard weather in some places, no heat, no water, the blessing of people helping others, some people overlooked when they need help, we are learning what kind of leaders we have and what kind of people we are!

Jesus rarely exercised power over others or tried to control circumstances! He made different choices, choices built on love and mercy! Self-denial is not about being out of control or powerless! It is about choosing right over bad! Choosing mercy over ruthlessness!

Jesus knew what was ahead for him! He predicted it! He spelled it out! He would suffer, he said! He would be rejected, he said! He would be killed, he said! After three days he would rise to life, he said! And he did not flinch!

He could have run! He did not! There was no short-cut to the world's salvation! And there is no short-cut now! He took it all on! The world's need! Our need! Because, he loves us so! The wondrous things love gets done!

In Jesus' day evil was not the Sanhedrin or Pontus Pilate or Rome or the Jewish political structure! Evil was inside the people! People like Peter! People then! People now! People who want religion to be soft and easy!

Jesus told his people then and in every age what they had to do to be a faithful believer! "Take up your own cross," he said, "and follow me!" And, so we do that! We stand up for the Cross! Even as we work to fully understand what that means! We, stand up! We stand up for love! We stand up for mercy! We stand up for people! All people! We tear down the walls that divide people! We are happy that darker skinned people are our sisters and brothers! We create and build! We serve! We give! We help in healing the result of hatred in our world!

And we are not afraid!            AMEN

