



# SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE REV. CRISTI CHAPMAN, CURATE  
THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, SEPTEMBER 3, 2017  
JEREMIAH 15:15-21; PSALM 26: 1-8; ROMANS 12:9-21; MATTHEW 16:21-28

## FOLLOW BY EXAMPLE

**Matthew 16:21-28** *[Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."]*

*Then Jesus told his disciples, "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 will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?"*

*"For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."]*

Fifth grade was an interesting year. Before school began, my parents decided my brother and I needed to change schools. My fourth grade experience had been more like a three ringed-circus. Every few months, a new teacher would arrive in the classroom only to be chased out a few weeks later by someone at the school. I recall only one thing clearly from fourth grade: the words to Bette Midler's "The Rose." One of my teachers that year loved that song, and before she left, she wanted to make sure we

knew it. No wonder my parents thought it was time to move to a new school!

When the new school year started, my brother jumped in right away and adjusted quickly. Within the first month, David had lots of new friends, and not long after that, he was on his way to sleepovers and soccer practices. My experience was a little different. As the quiet, reserved one, I was much more cautious. It's hard to be the new kid on the block, especially when you are shy! But that was only part of my challenge.

Early in the school year, it became painfully clear I was behind in a number of subjects, especially in math. Being on the outside looking in is not easy. When you are a girl, in 5th grade, and far behind in math, it is really hard to be on the outside.

That's where Mrs. Carter (and perhaps the Holy Spirit) come in. By some twist of fate (or moment of grace?), Mrs. Carter was assigned as my fifth grade teacher. Most students were less than thrilled about her. She had a reputation as "the mean" teacher, the one who prioritized order in her classroom and over fun. She was a master at spotting trouble and shutting it down before things got out of hand. Even the troublemakers were stunned by the speed with which she acted. But she was not just a disciplinarian. Mrs. Carter also had a soft spot, especially for kids who were struggling. Helping kids on the edge was her real passion. When she discovered how hopelessly lost I was in school, she went into action.

For weeks, Mrs. Carter tutored me after school. At first, even the simplest math concepts were impossible for me to grasp. That didn't deter her. Despite how little I knew or how slowly I learned, Mrs. Carter would never give up. As long as I showed up and tried, so did she. Even though it took years for some those concepts to sink in, eventually her efforts paid off. After college, I went on to become a CPA and remarkably, through that first vocation, I discerned a call to the priesthood.

Mrs. Carter helped me find a firm footing academically. That was not the most

important gift she she gave me though. Because of her, I discovered most of the best life lessons happen outside the classroom. Some of the best teachers are those who use their own lives as examples for others to follow.

That brings us to today's lessons. On this Labor Day weekend, we find ourselves deep in the heart of the Gospel, deeply immersed in what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

Immediately before this morning's Gospel passage, Peter confesses Jesus as Messiah. Now, Jesus wants all his friends to be clear what that means. As God's Anointed One, Jesus represents God's continuing promise to be with and to renew all of Creation. But that mission of peace and reconciliation will not be carried out through conventional means. Instead, God's Beloved will be betrayed and executed before resurrection can occur. New life comes but only after suffering and death. Jesus wants be clear that this is his mission and how that mission will be accomplished.

Jesus also wants to be clear about something else. Anyone who follows Jesus must also make the same journey and experience the same fate as Jesus. To say "yes" discipleship means saying "yes" to a whole lot of trouble. Saying to "yes" to God also means refocusing all of one's life on God and giving up one's self completely to God's service.

All of the synoptic gospels include this story. Mark and Luke report that Jesus "*tells*" his friends what is to come. Matthew, on the other hand, says that Jesus "*shows*" his friends what will happen. Why the difference?

For Jesus, every means possible is needed to communicate the urgency and importance of God's mission. Words can only go so far. Good stories don't always translate into obvious or desired action by the audience. When the message is difficult or confusing, there is a temptation to stop listening and check out. Many can attest that the breakdown in public discourse today reflects that challenge.

Peter's denial is not a rejection of Jesus though. What Jesus shares about himself *is* difficult to understand and accept. Rather than giving up on Peter and the rest of his friends, Jesus finds another way to reach them. He teaches them not only with words but also with the example of his own life. Word becomes flesh not just to talk to us but to model a way forward for us to follow.

The writer of Matthew's gospel also has to find compelling ways to inspire his audience. As his early Christian community forms, they struggle to understand who they are in relation to others. After the fall of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE, the world around them collapses. They are left to wonder how to respond in the face of such chaos. For God's mission of reconciliation and renewal to continue, they will have to act. But how? By extension, we also wonder about the same question today as the stability of our world becomes less certain.

For the full power of Jesus's offering to have meaning, all of his followers must live into his example. For God's mission of peace and reconciliation to continue, we must give ourselves over to God, take up our crosses, and follow the example of Jesus. That's what

is at the heart of discipleship: embodying in our lives what we profess with our lips.

Like the first century disciples, we find ourselves at a never ending crossroad, where continual choice must be made. Where do we place our hope: in conventional solutions or in the promise of boundless mercy and love of God? How do we act: firmly entrenched and stuck in place or actively engaged making God's promise visible now?

As individuals and as communities, we continually wonder how to put faith into action. Last December, this community responded in a decisive and unequivocal way. The *Statement of Commitment and Action*<sup>1</sup> by Saint Mark's reflects the commitment you have made to actively embody God's mission of reconciliation and renewal. Your example is also inspiring others in this diocese and beyond to follow what you are doing. As your curate, I am thrilled to minister alongside you as you live into this Covenant.

The Covenant is not the only way faith is put into action. Through the vows made at baptism, we all promise to put faith visibly into action. That happens not only through work in this place but also through the ordinary moments of our lives. In the coming weeks, reflect on how that happens in your life and the examples you have seen. Who are the Mrs. Carter's you know? How have you been that person to others? Give thanks for those examples and share those with each other. Then support each other as

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.saintmarks.org/serve/volunteer/justice-ministry/renewing-our-covenant/>.

you take up your own crosses to bear the light of Christ to others.

To follow Jesus is both difficult and life giving. There are times when like Jeremiah, we cry out in frustration....times when the human dignity of a fellow brother or sister is challenged because of how they express their gender identity. There are times when like Peter, we are overwhelmed and confused how to move forward...when, like a friend in Houston says, “the honeymoon ends, the

magnitude of the catastrophe from the hurricane is clear, and I wonder, what next?” Finally, there are times when like the Psalmist, we may give thanks for the ordinary ways God’s kingdom is revealed in everyday life. As we go from this place, may God give us the courage always to follow Jesus so we may be an example for others to follow, too. AMEN.



SAINT MARK'S  
EPISCOPAL CATHEDRAL

*Saint Mark's Cathedral lives in a grounded faith and spirituality; we seek to liberate people for ministry. We are grounded in ancient Christian scripture and tradition while at the same time remaining open to the insight and truth of contemporary life. You'll find Saint Mark's Cathedral actively involved in service and outreach to our community. Together we pray, worship, study the scriptures, and explore the richness of twenty-one centuries of Christian experience. Wherever you are on your journey of faith, you are welcome here!*