

## Choosing the Cross

### Mark 8:31-33

*<sup>31</sup> 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. <sup>32</sup> He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup> 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."*

This is the Word of the Lord.

### **Thanks be to God.**

In her devotional *Lent in Plain Sight*, Jill Duffield writes that whenever she reads the story of Jesus on the cross, she wants to change it.

*"I want Jesus to come down from the cross," Jill writes. "Give those who hurt him their due...I want this scene to play out like a comic book, a superhero movie, recompense and victory coming just as the hero looks doomed."*

That would be the more comfortable story. The happier, safer story. That would fit into our ideas of victory and justice, and what we think God should do. But that isn't how the story goes. That isn't what happens. Jesus stays on the cross. And even before that, Jesus goes to the cross. Jesus keeps healing the sick, welcoming the outcast, forgiving sinners, and proclaiming a radical new Kingdom of God that comforts the disturbed and disturbs the comfortable. He continues on in this ministry, even when he knows that this will be the cost.

It is a strange thing believing that the Lord and Savior of the earth, God with us, Emmanuel, came and died this way. And in the first couple of centuries, most of the audience who heard the gospel story thought it was foolishness. They scoffed at the story. They thought it was ridiculous. A God who would choose to die in one the most demeaning, violent, horrific ways possible. That doesn't seem like a very powerful or wise God. That seems like a foolish God, a crazy God. That is why Paul says: "The message of the cross is foolishness...but God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom" (1 Corinthians 1:18 and 1:25).

Dying on the cross looks like weakness by the patterns of our world. It looks like foolishness. It looks like failure. But for 2,000 years now it has brought people, especially those who know their own deep suffering and loss, pain, and abandonment, it has brought them hope and communion, love and salvation – belief that God knows and remembers them too. In his book *The Crucified God*, Jurgen Moltmann points out that for people who are on the margins – the poor, the oppressed, the forgotten, the rejected – the image of Jesus on the cross has always been the one that has connected the most.

It is because in coming to the cross, God chose to fully enter into our human suffering. God did not keep us at arm's length. God did not just offer some kind words from on high and then say you are on your own. In going to the cross in Jesus Christ, God fully experienced human suffering, pain, rejection, and abandonment. It is a strange story, a strange scene of God not doing what we would do, not wavering or running, or choosing the superhero path.

But it is because God knows that love does not come through force. Love comes through solidarity. Loves come through joining with. Love comes through sacrificing for others. And God loves us and God loves this world so much that God does not and will not hide or run from our suffering, our pain, our loss, our injustice, our abandonment, our anger, our sorrow, our grief. Through the cross, God enters in. There is nothing we can face, nothing we have gone through, in which God has not and will not join us there. Moltmann says that God goes to the cross in Jesus "so that all [of us] the godless and the godforsaken can experience communion with him."

The story off the cross is foolishness because we expect God to choose the things we would choose. But God chooses instead solidarity with those who are hurting and sacrificial love for those who are forsaken. And in all the years that have followed, the cross has turned from a symbol of hate and evil and oppression to one of love and goodness, justice, and hope.

In her devotion, Jill Duffield shares why God does not leave the cross, writing:

*"We worship the God who refuses to leave any person, place or circumstance forsaken and irredeemable. We worship the God whose power is made perfect in weakness. We worship the God who forgives the very ones who taunt and torture, deride and degrade. We worship the God whose vulnerable, sacrificial love takes on the sin of [all people]."*

The story of the cross is the story of God entering into the full human experience.

And that is our challenge. To enter in too. To show solidarity. To not hide or turn away from the pain of the world, but to face it and to join in alongside of those who are hurting, those who are hungry, those have been marginalized and left out.

Our challenge is to bring the love of the cross back to the center of our faith. To see how Jesus loved and joined with people who are hurting, and for us to do the same.

There are plenty of ways we can do this. Hearing stories, Praying for our world. Serving with and alongside. Advocating for those who need support.

But one more historical way I want to invite you to try is this. This week, I want to invite you to find one day to fast. Have a breakfast. Even have lunch. But then go the rest of that day without

food. For myself I am going to try this on Tuesday. And I won't break the fast until breakfast on Wednesday morning.

As you fast, consider the people who do this every day, and not by choice. It is estimated that there is almost a billion people around our planet who go hungry every day. Some live far away. Some live much closer than we'd think. Children are a huge percentage of this. During the fast, pay attention to how your body feels. And then pray for those who do not have enough food. As you fast, consider whatever you would have spent on food for that time. Maybe \$5, maybe \$10, maybe \$20 or \$40. And later this week, donate that to Bainbridge Mission or Feed More, or another ministry you may know that feeds our community.

That fast may be a very small way we can join in and stand with and begin to better love our neighbors and love our world, this world Jesus loved so much that he went to the very cross to join with and save. Amen.