

The second of Lent. The scripture text is taken from Mark 8:31-38

God's Word has priority over everything else, but many Christians are not prepared to accept it. This is the main reason why many Christians feel frustrated and inadequate, even though they read the Bible, attend worship, pray, and try to live as a witness for Christ.

We can only experience victory in our lives when we become like Christ, who accepted every human weakness, to fulfil God's will.

In our gospel narrative for today, Jesus rebuked Peter, saying, "Get behind me Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things, but on human things." (verse v33)

Peter, Jesus' disciple, had just proclaimed Jesus' true identity, declaring, "You are the Messiah." But when he heard the cost to be paid for the revelation of God's divine love and will for a fallen, broken, and sinful world, Peter would not accept it.

Peter could not accept that his teacher, his friend, that Jesus, who accepted every human weakness, would suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and then raised on the third day.

Peter, therefore took Jesus aside and began to rebuke Him. This same Peter, who a short time earlier, had declared Jesus to be the Messiah, the Lord, was now telling his Lord, that He, did not know what he was talking about.

This sounds like what we often do. Peter, (an ordinary guy, just like you and me), rebuking Jesus, implying that he (that would be Peter), knew more than Jesus did.

To Peter, Jesus had to be wrong, and he (Peter) could not understand why Jesus was having difficulty understanding the obvious, that God would not allow Him to go through such suffering.

Peter, who had called Him, Lord, refused to trust and believe His words. He chose to rely instead, on his own feelings and ignored what Christ was saying.

He was mindful of the things of men, rather than the things of God. To correct Peter's misplaced concern and to make His point, unmistakably clear, Jesus turns to face Peter and then says: "Get behind me Satan!"

Here, Jesus refers to Peter as the devil, using the same words He used when confronted by the devil in the wilderness.

The devil's message, was that, there was no need for Christ to die for the sins of the world, and Peter was just repeating that.

Christ Jesus, who accepted every human weakness focused only on God, but Peter was motivated by his own desires.

When Peter focused on his own desires, rather than the will of God, Peter became a stumbling block to God.

Although Peter was speaking out of his own concern for Jesus, what Peter said, was contrary to the will and the plan of God.

Peter, without even realizing it, was actually working against God, working in league with the devil, to prevent Christ Jesus from fulfilling His God-given mission.

God wants our decisions to be based on His will, and not on our emotions. When we live by our feelings, which are not in accordance with the Word of God, we end up supporting the kingdom of darkness.

When Peter based his decision, on his emotions, rather than the Word of God, Peter was only joining forces with the enemy. What God wants, is more important than what we feel.

Acknowledging the Lordship of Christ, is the beginning of a journey, an intimate relationship with Him.

Following Christ, is not about following a set of laws, a set way of worshipping, or our thoughts and emotions, it is following in faith.

This journey can be compared to a marriage. In marriage, we often do not know what we are getting into, where life will lead us or how we will change over a period of time.

The main thing, however, is committing ourselves to another person, no matter what happens, whether in “sickness, or in health, or for better or for worse”.

We can only keep our enthusiasm when we are focused on Christ, and have in mind the things of God, not the things of this world.

Think about this: In our life faith, almost every decision we make, either promotes the Kingdom of God, or the kingdom of Satan.

When it comes to our walk of faith, there are no neutral decisions in life. You are either on God’s side, or you are not. Christ does not half-hearted, half-committed Christians.

True commitment to Christ, means no turning back, even at the risk of death. It means denying ourselves and becoming like Christ, who accepted every human weakness.

To deny yourself, is to say, “no” to something you really want. It is willing to say, “no”, to your preferences, in obedience to God.

Every person is given the opportunity to deny him or herself and take up His or her cross. Your cross is the place where you can make the decision not to please yourself, but to please God. As a Christian, your will, my will should mirror the will of God.

An intimate relationship with Christ is much more, than, an emotional or sentimental desire for His blessings.

Unfortunately, many Christians today, have a sentimental relationship rather than, an intimate one, so that when following Christ Jesus, and denying self and laying down their lives, they fall short.

And I am going to use this as a good example. Not too long ago, a pastor friend of mine, introduced me to the term, “Consumers of a religious experience”. It’s kind of funny when you hear it, and think about it, but what this means is this, ask yourself these questions: “Am I, truly committed to Christ and His Church?” Or “Am I here, to be strengthen and re-affirmed in the faith, so that I can go out

into the world as a disciple of Christ and reach out to those who are lost?" Or "Am I here, to lift up and affirm my fellow believers?" Or, "Am I here to be entertained?" Or, "Do I look at the church as just a social club where we meet once a week?" Or "Am I here because I am shopping around to find what suits my needs?"

When I hear things like, "I just don't like the way the pastor preaches, his message is too short or too long", or "the music just doesn't do it for me, I would rather have just the old hymns", or the famous seven last words: "We have always done it, this way!"

This is what the world sees and this is one of the reasons why they mock us. What we need to do, is to be faithful in all aspects of our lives, and to show the world, is that we are people who are committed to Christ, not just on Sunday morning, but every morning, every day and every night of the week, willing to step out in faith and do what needs to be done.

The story is told of a young boy who got his hand stuck in a very expensive antique flower vase. His parents did all they could, to free his hand but to no avail.

His parents tried pouring soap on his hand, that didn't work, his parents tried pouring oil on his hand, it didn't work, so they finally decided to break the antique vase, they lifted the boys arm up to break the vase, and as the boy saw the anguish on his parents faces, he asked: "Do think it will help if I let go of the coin I am holding on to?"

As believers, what are the many of things in this life that threatening to break us? Are you holding on to something that will destroy you?

Let go of whatever it is, and submit yourselves to God's desires. When we do this, we are not only rewarded in this life, but also in eternity.

In this life, we can gain God's life when we lose our own life. If, however, we decide to live our own life, we live a life that does not benefit us.

It is like being offered a million dollars, which you can only receive when your life is taken from you. That money does not benefit you because you cannot spend it.

If we decide to live our own life, run our own existence and develop our own agenda, we end up with a life, we cannot spend.

But if we lose our life, that is, give up all rights to our life, God will give us His life, which enables us to really live.

God wants us to offer ourselves as living sacrifices, daily laying aside our own desires to follow Him.

God wants us to put all of our energy and resources at His disposal and trusting Him to guide us. For example, the Apostle Paul did just that. He gave up his life. He no longer had any plans or a desire of his own and was only interested in fulfilling God's purpose. That is why he could say: "And it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20)

The only thing that mattered to the Apostle Paul, was what mattered to God. We are not only rewarded in this life, but also in eternity.

God wants us to throw down our life, to lose our life, and to pick up it again, and receive His life.

Ok, so what does this look like? It means going where God calls you to go in this world, and to serve God and His people faithfully.

It means praying for others when you don't feel like praying them. It means serving others, when you would rather be served.

It means speaking for those who have no voice: the widow, the orphan, the poor, the oppressed, and those who hold no power.

It means remembering that you and I are disciples of Christ, brothers and sisters in Christ (we are not to be consumers of a religious experience), I can get a religion experience in a movie theatre but that doesn't make me a follower of Christ.

It means that we follow Christ in love, in humility, and in faith, in a faith that means I would go so far, as to lay down my life for Him, as He laid down His life for me. Think about it, really and honestly think about it.

Fellow Christians, you and I have been baptized into the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. By Christ's death upon that cross, you and I have been forgiven of our sins, our sin debt has been paid for in full.

By Christ's resurrection over sin, death, and the devil, we have been given the promise of the resurrection, and eternal life with God our Father. The victory is ours, it cannot be taken away.

So on this second Sunday in Lent, as continue our journey towards Holy Week and Easter, perhaps it's time to pause and to reflect upon our life of faith, our walk with Christ, and what it means to lose one's life, and to pick up that cross and follow Christ in faith. Amen.

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus Christ, you call your disciples of all times and of all places, to pick up their cross and follow You in faith. As we journey through the wilderness of this Lenten Season, by the power of your Holy Spirit, let us put aside our own selfish desires, and to truly draw closer to You in faith, and to pick up that cross and follow You wherever you may lead us in this life, knowing that through our relationship with You, You will empower us to go forth and to good and faithful witnesses of the gospel. All these things we humbly pray, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.

