

The Reading of Proverbs 1:20-33

²⁰Wisdom cries out in the street;
in the squares she raises her voice.

²¹At the busiest corner she cries out;
at the entrance of the city gates she speaks:

²²“How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple?
How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing
and fools hate knowledge?

²³Give heed to my reproof;
I will pour out my thoughts to you;
I will make my words known to you.

²⁴Because I have called and you refused,
have stretched out my hand and no one heeded,

²⁵and because you have ignored all my counsel
and would have none of my reproof,

²⁶I also will laugh at your calamity;
I will mock when panic strikes you,

²⁷when panic strikes you like a storm,
and your calamity comes like a whirlwind,
when distress and anguish come upon you.

²⁸Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer;
they will seek me diligently, but will not find me.

²⁹Because they hated knowledge
and did not choose the fear of the LORD,

³⁰would have none of my counsel,
and despised all my reproof,

³¹therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way
and be sated with their own devices.

³²For waywardness kills the simple,
and the complacency of fools destroys them;

³³but those who listen to me will be secure
and will live at ease, without dread of disaster.”

The Reading of Mark 8:31-38

Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection

³¹Then 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. ³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But 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."

³⁴He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel,^[a] will save it. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸Those who are ashamed of me and of my words^[b] in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

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What Do Followers Do?

Proverbs 1:20-33, Mark 8:31-38

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What is Jesus asking of his followers? This time the crowd AND the disciples.

Deny themselves.

Deny themselves what exactly?

Comfort? – Jesus just talked about suffering, his own, it made Peter uncomfortable

Religious validation? – The Scribes and Pharisees are going to reject Jesus, and these were his students, their faith would reject them too

Human power and authority? – Set your mind on divine things, not human things, that will come up again, soon, like the very next time Jesus gets to talking about how he won't survive this mission

Riches? – Jesus' followers are expected to give up having an abundance of possessions

Sanity? – Are they following a crazy person

What does a person have to give up to follow Jesus? And why does it seem so personal?

You have to give up yourself – some of the things that seem to make you-you to follow Jesus.

Who wants to hear that? Following will involve sacrifice perhaps of a pretty big order.

Denial of the ego. – In psychological terms, one's personal identity. You give up "YOU" for the benefit of all. Seeing yourself less as the center of all things, and more of a participant in all things.

But if we think about what Jesus is asking us to deny – it's mostly the things that we idolize and therefore get into trouble with anyway.

Take up their cross.

After you give up those things that the world considers important,

What do you pick up instead? A cross.

Ugh. It's not getting any better, is it?

You give up comfort, religious validation, human power, riches and your sanity,

And what do you get in return? The instrument of your death. Cheery!

But I like to think about it differently. Maybe Jesus is telling his followers that they must take up their own life's work, the thing that they will go to the grave needing to keep doing.

What is it that you would be willing to give your life for, all of it?

"My followers," Jesus tells us, are going to do that.

How do we possibly live and die in such a way that our cross, our mission will be made visible?

Jill Duffield reminded me in her *Outlook* article this week how it has been expressed in the past, in our Confessions: "In life and in death, we belong to God." In body and soul, mind and spirit, everything that we are, everything that we will be is God's.

We don't belong to ourselves, nor to our work or school, nor to our spouse, or children, or parents. We belong to God.

What are we going to do with that information?

Participate fully in the journey that leads to the cross.

So, you've decided to follow Jesus. (FYI) That means losing your life, see paragraph 1, and then pay attention to the following explanation that Jesus makes.

³⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel,^[a] will save it. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?

What do the followers of Jesus do?

Voluntarily, knowingly, let go of the life they know

in exchange for living their lives for the sake of the good news.

You have to choose, keep the baggage that you know, OR

Take what is waiting for you behind the curtain of your own life as Jesus reveals it.

You see, you might get the whole world, the WHOLE WORLD, if you play the game right.

If you concern yourself with power, and riches, and fame, that “could” happen for you.

Many of us have wanted some combination of those things.

Or on the flip side of that, maybe your baggage to unpack includes comfort, security, and cultural validation. Saying, I'm a good person. I live a safe life.

Again, are you going to choose to save that life? If you hold on to it, the loss may still be yours.

You've heard my Benediction before – The one that seems like it shouldn't be said at church.

And yet, we all secretly love it for its subtle rebellion against the kind of religion that would deny the truth about life – that we will all suffer in it – and really, it's more about how we choose our suffering.

May you be blessed – it says - with discomfort, with anger, with sadness, with foolishness.

May you be blessed by choosing to follow the path that leads to you to death.

But let me tell you a secret – ALL the paths lead to your death. It doesn't happen any other way.

Which path will teach you the wisdom and secrets that LIFE has to offer?

Which path is Jesus calling you to take?

May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships so that you will live deeply and from the heart.

May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression and the exploitation of people, so that you will work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer pain, rejection, hunger, and war, so that you will reach out your hand to comfort them and turn their pain to joy.

May God bless you with just enough foolishness to make a difference in this old world, so that you will do those things that others say cannot be done.