

**“Why Follow Christ?”**  
Mark 8:27-38  
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Rev. Jeong Park  
Fair Oaks United Methodist Church

Friday is my sermon preparation day. I always remind my wife that I need a quiet time in my office. So she usually doesn't interrupt me on Fridays. This Friday, I wanted to focus on my sermon in a quiet place, but there was reality! Imagine an active 21 month old baby in the house. Now he almost runs around everywhere making noises. My house became a different world unlike my wish. Around evening time, I heard noises from the living room. Jacob was enthusiastically riding on his toy horse making incomprehensible noises. A minute later, Jacob tried to follow his mommy dragging his toy, while my wife was cleaning the kitchen. Continually, I heard my wife's high tone language to Jacob, but he wouldn't stop it. I took a deep breath in and out. A while later, this time, Jacob kept hitting the door with toys, because Youngjae put him in his room while she was running vacuum machine. Never ending noises! I was dealing with our Scripture reading, especially this part, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

What should parents be? No doubt, being a parent is not an easy call. Actually, it is a challenge. It requires your patience, commitment and many times sacrifice. Moreover, it is not a short-term mission trip, but it is a life long commitment. It reminds me of Jesus' saying in our reading, “denying yourself and take up your cross.” In other words, “do not run from suffering; embrace it”. But we know that it can be a wonderful blessing to be parents.

When I heard all those noises in my house, I was working on Jesus' question to Peter. Let me ask you two questions this morning. “Who do people say Jesus is?” and “Why do we follow Christ?” Peter's immediate answer was “You are the Messiah.” But Jesus sternly ordered him not to tell anyone about him. Moreover, Jesus said that the Messiah must undergo great suffering and be rejected by people. What was wrong with Peter? What was the point of Jesus' teaching?

Let's go back to our reading again. Jesus and his disciples headed out for the villages around Caesarea Philippi. Archeology study shows us that Caesarea Philippi was built on the site of an earlier city named Paneas, after the Greek God Pan. Herod the Great had built a temple there in honor of Caesar Augustus. (63BC-14AD) Perhaps, Jesus naturally tried to associate the image of the Emperor of Rome with his understanding of the Messiah when he was going through this town. As Jesus and his disciples walked, Jesus asked, “Who do

people say that I am?” The disciples shared what they heard: “Some say, John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and still others say, ‘one of the prophets.’” Jesus then directly asked, “What are you saying about me?” Peter said, “You are the Christ, the Messiah.” Truly, his confession is the heart of the Christian message. This is simple and profound. Even though Peter knew the right answer, he didn’t clearly understand what it really meant. Jesus proclaimed the way of the cross for the Messiah: *Suffer and die*. Jesus suffered and died not for himself, but for others. The way of the cross symbolizes Christian life rather than self centeredness. Christian life centers on service to community, not individualism.

Let me share another story. A man had a strange dream. He decided to talk to his minister about his dream. “Pastor, I dreamed I died, and I’d gone to heaven, and as I was looking around everything was deserted.” Pastor replied, “Everything was deserted?” “Yeah. Oh, there were trees and grass and streets and houses and buildings of all kinds. There just were no other people.” Pastor said, “You got to heaven and there were no other people. Are you sure it was heaven?” The man said, “Well, yeah. It was heaven. I mean Jesus came finally, and he welcomed me, and I didn’t know what to say. ‘Where is everybody?’ And Jesus said something strange to me, he said, ‘You were expecting other people?’ And I said, ‘Well, yeah. I’d kinda hoped that maybe my family, you know, or somebody else, anybody else. I mean, am I the only one who made it?’ And Jesus said, ‘No, of course not. Lots of other people. God loves everyone. I died for all humanity.’ ‘Well then why am I the only one here?’ ‘Well, you know your favorite hymn. You sang it nearly every day of your life, hummed it to yourself, thought about it. “I come to the garden alone,” you sang, “and He walks with me and talks with me,” but it never mentioned any other people. And when you talked to other people about your faith, you claimed me as your personal savior. And there’s nothing wrong with that but your meaning was private. How you imagined me in life is how you get me in death. So here I am, and here you are. Isn’t this what you wanted? Isn’t this what you wanted? Isn’t this what you wanted?....’ ‘And suddenly Jesus faded away, and I woke up. Who do you think Jesus is?”

A great theologian, Paul Tillich said, “Whenever the Divine appears in all its depth, it cannot be endured by men. It must be pushed away by the political powers, the religious authorities and the bearers of cultural tradition. As we think about crucifixion, we look at the rejection of the Divine by humility.” For the questions I raised in the beginning, “Who do you think Jesus is?” We would say that Jesus was the Messiah. He was not a glory oriented Messiah, but courageously centered on others. When our culture drives us to put ourselves into “only Me, Me and Me culture”, we, Church and Christians should be bold to say, “I want to care for others those who are left out, marginalized, those who are suffering, hungry and poor.” The essence of Evangelism and mission was to

share good news of the Messiah and to reach out to those who are seeking the Messiah. If the church loses vital energy for mission and healthy spirit, it will only become a fellowship gathering.

Recently, our worship committee has been discussing making a special offering for the Christmas Eve service. This year, we want to support our outreach ministries. One of the ideas was to support the Heifer International Project. Some of you know well about our Heifer table. The Heifer ministry was started by a Midwestern farmer named Dan West. During the Spanish Civil War while he was ladling out milk rations to hungry children, an idea hit him. **“These children don't need a cup, they need a cow.”** So West returned home to form Heifers for Relief, dedicated to ending hunger permanently by providing families with livestock and training so that they "could be spared the indignity of depending on others to feed their children." In 1944, the first shipment of 17 heifers left York, Pennsylvania, for Puerto Rico, going to families whose malnourished children had never even tasted milk. He envisioned a new future for the better life of children in poor countries. “These are young cows that haven't yet given birth – making them perfect not only for supplying a continued source of milk, but also for supplying a continued source of support.” This simple idea of giving families a source of food rather than short-term relief caught on and has continued for more than 65 years. ([www.Heifer.org](http://www.Heifer.org))

Jesus Christ is still inviting us to follow him and to change our minds from self centeredness to other centeredness. Following the Messiah is not about sacrificing your life, but an invitation to share joy and support new lives. Your willingness and commitment helps us to carry out our church missions. Amen.