

02.18.2024 sermon by Pastor David K Park
Scripture : Jeremiah 31:31-34, Hebrews 5:5-10
Title : Have Resurrection Faith (1)

The cross has become the symbol of Christianity today. When Jesus died on the cross, our sins were forgiven. However, today, there are more people who wear their crosses proudly for others to see than those who carry the burden of their crosses. In today's Old Testament reading, God tells us to take His laws to heart, and he says that if you do so, I will be your God and you will be my people.

Pilate is probably one of the most resented names in the Bible. He was the Roman governor of the land of Judea at the time. On Passover, it was customary to release a prisoner. It was actually an invention of the Jews themselves, a custom that had been practiced by Jewish kings since time immemorial, even before they became a province of the Roman Empire. In practice, however, it was an obstacle to justice and an act of encouragement to wicked criminals. Nevertheless, for Passover, Pilate was able to release at least one man. The man who stood a chance of being released along with Jesus was a robber named Barabbas, a felon who had committed all three of the felonies punishable by justice: rebellion, murder, and robbery. The Bible refers to him as a 'famous prisoner'.

Pilate didn't think the Jews would want to release Barabbas, a vicious murderer. He asked the crowd, expecting that they would spontaneously demand that Jesus be released, but he was wrong. The crowd would rather release Barabbas, but not Jesus. Pilate was unable to order the release of Jesus and was seen wondering, "What shall I do?" It's an opportunistic attitude. Pilate was trying to satisfy his own conscience and the angry crowd, but his indecisiveness could be our own today.

A person has lost his health. He didn't control his food and didn't do even the most basic exercise after eating. He also didn't regulate his sleep schedule at all, going to bed in the early evening on some days, staying up all night and waking up at dawn on others. His health problems were more serious than he realized. He became ill with all the so-called modern or adult diseases. He says "I don't know how I lost my health like this, but what can I do now? I have to live with it as my cross."

Can you find the error in this man's words? He is distorting the nature of the cross. His loss of health is only the result of his own mistakes, not the cross. Another man has lost a great deal of property through his own carelessness. If he says, "It's my cross, but what can I do? I must bear it," this is also a misrepresentation.

We sometimes confuse the cross with chastisement. The cross is the idea of taking on something you don't have to bear. Chastisement, on the other hand, is a punishment, sometimes forced upon us by God, for our faults. Therefore, the same suffering can be either the cross or chastisement. If you realize that your current suffering is your cross, you should bear it voluntarily.

You should take it without asking anyone. When Jesus took up his cross, he did so voluntarily and did not ask anyone if he should take up the cross.

Today's scripture reading says, "I will be your God." "I will be their God and they will be my people." In the New Testament, Hebrews 5:5, God says, "You are my son; today I have begotten you." Do you like that? In John 10, Jesus likens himself to the door of the sheepfold and the shepherd of the sheep. The Pharisees believed that since they were the shepherds of the church, Jesus, who had no authority from them, was just another interloper and impostor. Therefore, they were thoroughly opposed to him. But Jesus says that he is the door of the sheepfold and the shepherd of the sheep.

Philippians 3:8 tells us that the way of the cross requires us to discard everything else in order to gain Christ and become one with him. The way of the cross also tells us to take up the cross, desiring nothing in return. Every year around Easter Sunday, attempts to reenact the crucifixion of Jesus in the Philippines, a Catholic country, make international news. People carry a cross on their backs that looks as authentic as possible and are whipped to bleed. But no matter how heavy the cross and how much blood is spilled, it's all just theater.

The way of the cross is never easy. The way of the cross is never light. There is no trick to the way of the cross. But if you want to take up the cross with sincerity and honesty, you'll find that it's actually not that hard. The world we live in is not a long one. When God gives us health, He is telling us to fulfill our mission.

Today's New Testament scripture reading says, "Today I have begotten you; you are my Son." This is a testimony, a declaration. The day Jesus was crucified was Friday. The next day was the Jewish Sabbath. It was taboo for Jews to hang a prisoner on a cross on the Sabbath. But they couldn't take prisoners down from the cross when they weren't dead, so they asked the executioners to kill them. The cross had a small wooden board underneath for the hanging prisoner to step on. These are commonly called footstools. The rack is there because crucifixion is so painful that prisoners struggle to stand. However, if the prisoners' leg bones were forcibly broken, their legs would no longer be able to support them and their bodies would sag. This would increase the pressure on their hearts and cause them to bleed to death more quickly.

The suffering of modern people is not the suffering of carrying the cross, but the suffering of taking it off. Thomas A Kempis says, "If you are willing to take up your cross, the cross will bear you and carry you to the place you seek, the place where there is an end to suffering." The question "Jesus or Barabbas?" is not unique to the Jews of 2,000 years ago. It's every one of us today who stands at the crossroads of choice between these two.

May you see yourself in Pilate today. Have a gracious Lent. Amen.