



*Rev Chris Taylor - 4-14-19*  
*"The Way of Jesus"*

With Palm Sunday we move into Holy Week and the final events of Jesus' life. Jesus knew, even as he made his triumphal entry, exactly what lay ahead. He had told his disciples repeatedly. As Matthew puts it:

From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. Mt. 16:21, 22

But even with the warnings, Jesus' disciples were still surprised and crushed when he was crucified. As one of them put it, "But we had hoped [past tense] that he was the one to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21). Yet there is some evidence that at least some level his message had gotten through. When Jesus turned back towards Jerusalem, John tells us that one of his followers (Thomas) actually turned to the others and said, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (Jn. 11:16).

Is this what it means to be his followers? To join him on his trek to Jerusalem and die with him there? That's pretty much what Jesus says. Going back to the sixteenth chapter of Matthew, right after he predicts his death Jesus goes on to say: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Mt. 16:24).

In all my years of ministry I've never heard someone say that that is their favorite passage. There is something in us that doesn't like the idea of self-denial; something in us that shies away from the idea of suffering or sacrifice.

Over at Longwood we've been studying Pastor Adam Hamilton's work on Simon Peter. Hamilton puts it this way: "We're happy to follow Jesus provided it means blessings and bliss, hope and love, forgiveness and mercy. We want our religion to bless us, but we'd prefer it not ask anything too hard of us in return. I don't like self-denial; I'd prefer to have a convenient faith that doesn't demand too much sacrifice on my part."

But then here is Paul in our text calling us to have the same mind, the same attitude, that we see in Jesus himself, "who, though he was in the form of God, did

not regard equality with God as something to be exploited [or better: as something to be grasped], but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:6-8).

That sounds like self-denial. That sounds like following Jesus all the way to the cross. And the truth is that any faith that is authentically Christian, any faith that is true to scripture and true to Jesus, is going to lead us towards sacrificial living – lead us into living not for ourselves or our own success, but for God and for those around us. That is what it means to have the mind of Christ. The call here is to a whole new ethic for life.

Before you get too depressed, consider this: maybe instead of making us miserable or unhappy this new ethic actually opens the door to life at its very best; life at its most fully alive. Our own experience confirms the truth of it. Go on a mission trip, or go out of our way to help someone who is in need, and almost without fail what we experience is joy; what we find is a deep and abiding sense of fulfillment. I think this is what Jesus was getting at when he went on to say, “For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it” (Mt. 16:25).

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In his column in the New York Times last week, commentator David Brooks spoke of those lives that have what he calls “two mountains”. Everyone, he writes, starts out on the first. It is all about career and success, and its underlying assumption is that we can make ourselves happy: that if we achieve excellence, if we rise to the top and hit our goals and accumulate enough, that then happiness and fulfillment will follow.

But over the years, Brooks found that some people hit a wall. They achieved success but discovered it didn’t really satisfy. Or they tasted failure – they lost their jobs or endured some scandal. Or they were confronted with some unexpected turn of events: a bout with cancer, or the loss of someone they loved. Whatever the cause, the effect for these people was the same: all of a sudden their victories on the first-mountain weren’t all that important any more.

This is when they found a second one: a new mountain that had nothing to do with success or ego. It was about something bigger: “the desires of the heart (to

live in loving connection with others) and the desires of the soul (the yearning to serve some transcendent ideal...)."ii"

The people who find the second mountain move from success to fulfillment. They make the shift from acquisition to contribution, and these are the people that David Brooks has come to admire most.

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I think here of my friend Saleem Ghubril. He has the natural gifts to have succeeded in pretty much anything. I think he could have made a fortune in business or investments, in real estate or some profession. Instead, he became a pastor. One night, decades ago, he stood on Mount Washington and out of his commitment to Christ chose to devote his life to the city of Pittsburgh.

In the years that followed he created the Pittsburgh Project; pouring himself into bringing hope and renewal to a struggling community on the north side. He started the Mosaic Church there, where he continues to lead worship most Sunday mornings. Then, after getting the Project up and running, he was invited by the Mayor, the Superintendent of Schools, and a guy named Franco Harris to help create the Pittsburgh Promise. He became its Executive Director and in the years since then he has been instrumental in raising and distributing over a hundred and thirty four million dollars in scholarships to almost nine thousand Pittsburgh public school students which has allowed them to pursue higher education. The Pittsburgh Promise has touched and changed thousands of lives, and in the process it has had a transforming impact on the city itself.

Saleem turned from the first mountain long ago. His life has never been about success or acquisition. He gave his life to Jesus, and was led to devote his life to this city. He is still working that second mountain; still living for something greater than himself. He has made a lot of sacrifices along the way, but I think he would be the first to tell you he wouldn't have it any other way. He would be the first to say his life has been rich and full and truly blessed.

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When you think about what it means to have the mind of Jesus, think about that second mountain. It doesn't mean we have to shift careers or give up any hopes of success. What it does mean is bringing to whatever we are doing a different attitude, a different sense of purpose. When we make the shift to that

second mountain it is no longer all about us. When we embrace the mind of Jesus, it's about loving God and doing all that we can to serve Him and those around us.

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Towards the end of his column, Brooks shares a story from a book titled *Practical Wisdom*. It is about a hospital janitor named Luke. There was a young man in the hospital where he worked who had gotten into a fight and was in a permanent coma as result. “The young man’s father sat with him every day in silent vigil, and every day Luke cleaned the room. One day the father was out for a smoke when Luke cleaned it up.

“Later that afternoon, the father found Luke and snapped at him for not cleaning the room. Luke could have snapped back: *I did clean it. You were out smoking.*” If he just saw his job as cleaning rooms, that’s probably how he would have answered. But Luke didn’t see his job that way. He saw it as serving patients and their families. So he went back and cleaned the room just so the father could have the comfort of seeing him do it.

That’s second mountain thinking. That’s a mind that looks an awful lot like Jesus’ own.

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<sup>i</sup> Adam Hamilton, *Simon Peter*, (Abingdon Press, Nashville, 2018), p. 79

<sup>ii</sup> David Brooks, “The Moral Peril of Meritocracy”, *New York Times*, 4/6/2019