



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

September 19, 2021

Pastor Randy Ott

17<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

First Lesson: [Jeremiah 38:1-13](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 116

Second Lesson: [1 Peter 4:12-19](#)

Gospel Lesson/Sermon Text: [Mark 8:27-35](#)

### Grace Leads Us to Pick Up Our Cross and Follow Jesus

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace, mercy and peace are yours through the empowering work of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

If we are going to pick up our cross and follow Jesus, we are going to need the strength God provides, so we're going to have to know our Bibles pretty well. Any of you here have Bible Apps on your phone? Go ahead and get your phone out. I'll trust you're not playing games. I want to see who can find this passage first. Get your phones out. Don't just sit and look at my forehead. The passage isn't going to magically appear on my forehead. Just tell me if it's Old or New Testament. We'll make it easier. Just tell me if it's Old or New Testament. The passage is: *God helps those who help themselves*. So where is it? Someone tell me. I have all day. I have my coffee. I can stay up here. Old or New Testament, someone tell me. It's neither! It's not a Bible passage and yet it's quoted all the time as though it were! In fact, it kind of goes against what Scripture says. **...there is no one who does good, not even one.** All have sinned and turn away altogether and have become wicked. ([Romans 3:9-20](#).)

*God helps those who help themselves* kind of sounds like it's from the Bible, but it isn't. We just say it to remind us to work hard at things I suppose. Some people say it is from Benjamin Franklin. It goes back farther than that. It actually goes back to some Greek philosophers. We trace it way, way back. But I think it's kind of the antithesis of what is in Scripture. God helps those who cannot help themselves. You and I can't do anything to save ourselves.

That doesn't mean at times we don't think we know more than God. We talked about that last week when we looked at the healing of that man. But today, did you notice in

what I read to you from Mark in today? How Peter takes this step beyond *God helps those who help themselves* as though he is going to manipulate God into doing what he wants by saying "God, let me help you. You don't have it right."

So today we want to think about how instead of focusing on our thoughts and what seems right to us (like at that moment in time Peter was doing), we have to stay focused on God's grace, this undeserved love He has for us, so that it leads us to do unnatural things. It's an unnatural thing to pick up a cross and suffer. Yet for the sake of Christ this morning, that's what we are reminded to do and as Christians, there is a part of us that loves God and wants to do it.

In between what we talked about last week (the healing of the man born deaf and who couldn't speak very well), Jesus had fed 4,000. Not the feeding of the 5,000. He had fed 4,000 people with seven loaves of bread and a few fish. Then the disciples were talking about how Jesus had told them to watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees. They thought "Oh, He's upset because we didn't have enough bread." They didn't get what He was talking about. So they are walking and talking about that on the road. They were going to Caesarea Philippi, where we started reading. Jesus, wanting to teach His disciples because they were really missing the point about a number of things, asked them, **"Who do people say I am?"** They gave the response that basically said, "A lot of people think you're the prophet. Some thought you were John the Baptist who had come back. Some think Elijah because Elijah was supposed to come again right before the Messiah. Some say just another prophet." Jesus hears that, accepts that as what people are saying about Him, but then He gets to the point. **"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"** Peter gives a great answer. He says, **"You are the Messiah."** Messiah is Hebrew of "anointed one," which is the same as "Christ," which is Greek for "anointed one." "You are the anointed one, the one who would be anointed to be the one who would be the promised Savior." The problem is they didn't understand what it meant to be the anointed one quite fully just yet.

At the time of the Roman occupation, they were highly political in all the things they thought about, kind of like today. They viewed the coming Christ, or Messiah, as someone who would set them free from the Romans, not set them free from sin. Their eyes were a little lower because they were only focused on what was right in front of them. So when Peter confesses "You are the Messiah" or the Christ, Jesus tells them "Don't tell anyone about it" because they wouldn't know what they were talking about yet. Peter demonstrates that clearly because then as they continue on, it says from then on Jesus began telling them plainly, no more parables, no more earthly stories with heavenly meanings but very plainly, "Here is what is going to happen, guys. I'm going to be betrayed and handed over to the chief priests, the elders, and the teachers of the law. I'm going to be killed and after the third day I'm going to rise again. This is what I'm going to do as the Christ, or the Messiah." When He is telling them that, Peter has none of it. He takes Jesus aside and starts to rebuke Him, telling Him "That's nice Jesus.

You are the Christ, but you don't understand what Christ means. Let me tell you." He tells Him that's not his idea of the Christ, someone who would die. The rise again part seems to have gone in one ear and out the other. That didn't seem to connect. But he rebukes Jesus and tells Him this isn't how it could be because he is focused on HIS idea of what God's Messiah should look like.

Jesus doesn't really sugar coat an answer. He turns and addresses all the disciples and He says to Peter, **"Get behind me, Satan!"** That's not exactly a nice pet nickname, is it? Those are strong words but they fit because mankind's idea of what a Savior should be or what a Savior should do would distract Jesus from continuing onto the cross, to live and die, to defeat the power of Satan so that you and I would be forgiven because we're not perfect (like God says) and we deserve the wages of sin (which is death). Jesus has to let Peter have it right between the eyes. And He does. Over time Peter does come to get it because on Pentecost he preaches a beautiful sermon about how Jesus is the fulfillment and how He is the Messiah who lived, died and rose again, and he understands it with the outpouring of the Spirit in his heart but at this point in time, he didn't seem to get it at all. He didn't know and understand grace. He was looking for something earthly, something physical, something he could see and he had no concept of grace taking away the sins of the world not just getting rid of the Romans.

Here is where you and I have an advantage, right here right now where we are, over where Peter was on that day. You and I know why Jesus came to earth. We've seen the fulfillment. We've heard His marching orders. We've heard Him say "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth ([Acts 1:8](#))." We've heard Him tell us that as we do this, "If they hated me, they are going to hate you too ([see here](#))." We know that it's going to involve exactly what Jesus said it was. **"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."** The cross here means the sufferings you have (like it was talking about in our Second Lesson) because you are living the Christian faith and others don't always like it. This is the suffering He is talking about. He's not just talking about suffering we have in this world with sicknesses or things like that. He's talking about the cross, the difficulty that comes into life because you live for Jesus. He says if you're going to save your life and not have to go through that suffering, you're going to end up losing it because you'll deny the faith and lose the faith.

Don't take your false expectations of what it means to be a Christian and put it on what God says in Scripture. When He tells you this, He wants you to know straight out that it is going to be hard to live your faith at times because people will attack you. You will have to endure verbal attacks. It might cost you friendships. But if you're going to do what God has called you to do, that means you do the hard thing. It's the easy thing to not talk about Jesus so you don't have to suffer. It's the easiest thing to say "I want God's forgiveness but I don't want anyone else to know about it because if I talk about it, they might get upset with me." That's the easy thing. That's really what you're sinful

nature is going to tell you to do at times. The hard thing is to sit there and be called names that you have to go home and look up on Google to find out exactly what the guy was calling you. I've done that. It wasn't a compliment. It's not fun. I don't enjoy it. I don't like it. But as a Christian, that's what I'm called to do if I'm living my faith.

I'm not called to be a jerk about living my faith, to be rude and obnoxious so that they get mad at me just because I'm being so rude and obnoxious. I'm called to be kind, loving and also give an answer for the hope that I have but do it with gentleness and respect ([1 Peter 3:15](#)).

Are there times I've failed at that? Yes, and I'm guessing there are times when you probably have too. We're sinners. We sin. We don't do everything perfectly. This is why we rejoice at who Jesus is; that He is THE Christ, because He gave His life to pay for the sins when you and I fall short when we're trying to live for Him. He takes away all our sins, big, small, everything in between, however we view them. He's removed them all through His life and death; not because we're good, not because we've tried hard, not because we put ourselves on the line. He took away the guilt of our sins because of HIS UNDESERVED LOVE. It's ALL ABOUT HIM.

Now because that love surrounds us as Christians every day of our lives, that leads us to want to pick up our cross and follow Him and to at times have to endure the slings and arrows of those who don't appreciate people living the Christian faith. That's the cross we pick up and carry.

In the last, I don't know how many years, it's been such a weird few years, but this last Tuesday was one of the most encouraging nights I've had in the last however many years. This last Tuesday night, our Barnabas Ministry (Barnabas, the son of encouragement), this ministry designed to encourage those who seem to be drifting away from the use of the means of grace, this ministry that exists to encourage people to make faithful use of Word and Sacrament at worship, we met and we had the volunteers that are willing to serve at this point in time and do personal visits to encourage people to stay close to Jesus came. There were 22 people there. There were about 6-8 that said they want to serve but couldn't make it that night. In all the years that we've been doing this ministry, we've never had that many people willing to serve, to put themselves on the line to go out to their brothers and sisters in Christ and say "We love you. We're concerned about you. We want you in heaven with us. We want you to stay close to Jesus. Is there anything we can do to help you to be in worship online or in person?" This is what we're about. We want more Jesus to more people more often because we want people in heaven with us.

Do I think that some of those people are going to have to pick up their cross and follow Jesus as they talk to people at times? I think it's a real possibility because people we're talking to, like us, are sinners and sinners sin. But what moves us to want to do it, I think

what moves the heart of those people that were there that night and those who want to serve (it's not a ministry that is for everyone, I understand that), but the only thing that moves us to put ourselves on the line like this and to live our faith in the face of attack or persecution is this incredible love God pours out on us. If you think this ministry is about "You folks should be more like me. Look at me. I'm in church all the time," this ministry isn't for you. It's all about God's grace and pointing people to God's grace.

God's grace is all in all to us. It leads us to do the unnatural, the hard thing, which is to live our faith even when we know we will be attacked for it. The only thing that can move someone to want to do that is this incredible love that led our God to lay down His life to take away the guilt of your sins, my sins, and the sins of the whole world. Amen.

**And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ([Philippians 4:7](#).) Amen.**