

Following the Way of Love
Mark 8:27-38

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I recently watched a movie on Netflix called 'Same kind of different as me. It was something I put on as I was doing household chores, but it drew me in. The movie was about a couple who had grown apart. They had lots of money and a huge house in Texas, but for years they had been estranged. In the movie, the husband is the one who tells the story. He describes his wife as having a heart so big that Texas couldn't hold it, and when they get to the point where she tells him that he can leave, he says he does not want to. Part of the problem of how distant they are has to do with him not knowing and understanding her heart.

To go forward, he needs to understand exactly how big her heart is. It was not easy and he resisted, but she was stubborn. She took him to the mission where she served meals to the homeless as a way of introducing him to her passion of caring for the poor which he had ignored for years. She handed him an apron while he protested and came up with a thousand reasons why they needed to leave, but she kept saying no – you are doing this and so he did!

There was a man who came to the mission who was particularly violent. The first name we know him by is Suicide and the first time we see him in the movie he is swinging a baseball bat in the dining room breaking stuff while people are eating. He even breaks the glass window that says "Love is patient and kind. Love does not envy or boast...." The wife has seen this violent man in a dream and pursues a relationship with him. She encourages her husband to do the same. Her husband is reluctant – very reluctant – and yet he too persists with this sometimes-violent man, who wants nothing to do with either of them. Eventually a relationship is formed with this man which changes the husband's life in profound and wonderful ways. I won't tell you any more since I don't want to spoil the end of the movie.

The movie is based on a true story and I tell it because I believe it is a great example of taking up the way of the cross that Jesus asks us to do results in profound changes in our lives. Taking up the way of the cross leads us to abundant life even though it means facing obstacles and giving of ourselves.

There is much important teaching in this morning's gospel. It begins by Jesus asking the disciples who he is. He gets various answers, but Peter says that Jesus is the Messiah. It is the first time the disciples name Jesus as such and Jesus tells him to be quiet about it. Then Jesus goes on to tell them what will happen to him as the Messiah – that he will suffer and die, and be raised up after the third day. Peter is really upset and rebukes Jesus. This is not the Messiah Peter was expecting. And Jesus rebukes Jesus right back.

Then Jesus calls the crowds to come and tells them about what it will take to follow him. If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For 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, will save it. How many people think this is an attractive invitation? It may not be attractive, but it is a life-giving invitation.

In the movie, I believe the wife is inviting her husband to take up his cross. The husband wants to write a check to help the mission, but his wife insists he come and serve – actually serve the people food and be with the people. It was not an easy process, but in time the husband gave up his time, his assumptions, at times his safety and yes his money, but in the end, the money was the least of it for him. His life did change in wonderful and life giving ways.

Following Jesus means taking up our cross. Now my first thought when I think I about taking up our cross is about carrying something very heavy which is painful. At the same time, I know taking up my cross can lead to abundant life and not just in heaven but right here and right now. I really like how our presiding bishop, Michael Curry, talks about the way of the cross. He calls it the way of love and the way of Jesus. It is a way that takes us from “a world that looks less like our nightmare and more like God's

dream.” If he had to characterize the way of Jesus in three words it would be – loving, liberating, and life giving. It is liberating and life-giving because at its root it is loving.” It is in loving others that we take up our cross. It is in loving others and being in relationship with them, that we discover what our cross is and it is by pursuing this way of love that we discover that abundant life.

Today Matt Sussman comes to be baptized because he wants to follow the way of Jesus. The choice he makes today has not been easy for him. Matt comes from a Jewish family so he has done a lot of discernment to get to this point and we have met many times in preparation. Matt is promising to follow the way of love specifically in the Christian tradition through Jesus teachings. It is hard for his family and yet they are here to support him. In many ways, their being here today is their following their way of love. They know he is finding his way to live a life that is loving – our loving God.

My friends, as I say all the time, the world needs us and needs our love. The world needs us to live lives that are loving, life-giving and liberating whether we are Christian or not. So take up your cross, follow the way of love and discover the abundant life that happens when you out and love the world..