

September 3, 2017  
Pentecost 13A  
Matthew 16:21-28  
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There's a fairly well-known quote attributed to St. Francis of Assisi:

“Preach the Gospel.

When necessary, use words.”

It turns out that what St. Francis actually wrote had a little more to it.

He wrote, “It is no use walking anywhere to preach,  
unless our walking is our preaching.”\*

St. Francis held both the words and the actions of the Gospel life to be important,

But the key from his particular statement is that there's a lot that is preached without words.

There is so much that is shown and not necessarily told.

We hear this morning that,

After Peter had confessed that Jesus was the Messiah,  
Jesus begins to share with his disciples all the suffering he  
will endure,

Even to death,

In order to be raised.

And it's notable that the text doesn't say that Jesus told the disciples these things. . .

Instead, we hear, “Jesus began to show them—

He showed them that he must go to Jerusalem,

Undergo great suffering,

Be killed,

And on the third day, be raised.

How did Jesus show them this, I can't help but wonder?

Surely, he did speak about it,

But showing involves more than simply telling.

God seems to have a penchant for showing,  
Sometimes even more than telling.  
Because God doesn't just talk about renewal and redemption,  
God brings it about in Jesus Christ.  
God doesn't just talk about loving us literally to death and bringing us  
from that death to life,  
God in Jesus Christ dies for us and rises from that death to  
save us.  
And Jesus doesn't just talk about the way through which he will save us,  
He shows us death.  
And he shows that death on a cross.

Jesus goes on in our Gospel to speak of the way of discipleship—  
The way that involves denying ourselves,  
Taking up our cross,  
And following him.

Now when the disciples hear Jesus talk of the cross here,  
Remember, they are hearing it before his death,  
Before his resurrection.

Their only reference,  
Their only connection to the cross is death—  
the death of criminals, at that.

“If any want to become my followers,  
Let them take up their cross and follow me,” Jesus says.

And so the disciples at that time would have heard,  
“Take up the things that torture you,  
Limit you,  
Kill you.

Take them up and follow me.”  
Notice that we don't just pick up the cross and stay put.

Jesus ends the call with “follow me.”  
We get moving.  
Jesus is the focus—  
    Not the cross carried.  
Jesus is who we follow—  
    Jesus who conquered death,  
        Who conquered that cross carried.

And because of who we follow,  
    the cross we take up is not one that brandishes our failures,  
        or represents some bad hand we have been dealt,  
            not something we are simply forced to bear through  
            our lives.

Because of who we follow,  
    the cross we take up is not a burden.  
        The cross we take up is the cross that Jesus has already  
        conquered.

It's the cross we already wear.  
    It's a dripping wet cross, not a stark wooden one.  
    It's the cross by which we have already been saved.  
        It's the cross that marks us for life and not death.  
    It's an identifier of grace, not of shame.  
        It's a carrier of immense love, and not of hate.  
            It bears mercy and grace, not judgment and  
            vengeance.

The cross we take up,  
    We wear,  
        We bear,  
            is one way we show what Jesus has done for us and for  
            the world.

It's the showing in the midst of the telling.

Showing is a huge part of this life of discipleship.

Because we don't just talk about some water in a bowl over there,

Or about how good it would feel to be washed clean.

We are washed clean by God,

We are drowned and raised in baptism.

We don't just talk about a baptized life—

We live it!

New life in Christ is not lip service,

It's a life of service.

It's a visible,

Noticeable,

Radiated life.

A life that has been redeemed by a cross.

A life that takes up a cross,

And carries it,

And shows the world how that cross can change everything.

Showing is a huge part of this life of discipleship.

Because we don't just talk about Jesus' body and blood given and shed for us,

Or how good it would feel to be forgiven,

Fed,

And united as one.

We are forgiven.

We are fed.

We are made one in the bread and wine,

Which are the body and blood of Christ.

We don't just talk about a communal life—

We live it!

We live a life together that takes up a cross,

And carries it,  
And shows the world how that cross can change everything.

It changes how we treat others.

It changes how we treat ourselves.

It changes how we spend and give money.

It changes how we spend and give our time.

It changes how we react and respond,

How we listen and speak.

It changes who we are.

It changes who we think others are.

It changes our life.

It changes our death.

It changes our future forever.

And when the world tells us its lies,

And shows us its hurtful,

Hateful ways. . .

God tells us truth,

And shows us mercy and peace.

God tells us, "You are mine,

Nothing can take you away from me."

And then God shows us Jesus.

It is in the name of Jesus that we take up our cross,

Follow him,

Show and tell who our God is.

For "it is no use walking anywhere to preach,

Unless our walking is our preaching."

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jamie-arpinricci/preach-the-gospel-at-all-times-st-francis\\_b\\_1627781.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jamie-arpinricci/preach-the-gospel-at-all-times-st-francis_b_1627781.html)