

Pastor Roy's sermon from March 1, 2015

Jesus is blasted into the wilderness by the Spirit (Doesn't sound pleasant in Mark's use of "throw") and returns. Jesus gathers disciples, ministers to many and teaches his followers. At some point Jesus asks the disciples, "Who am I?" After some silence and what they think everyone else thinks about Jesus, Peter responds, "You are the Messiah." Jesus responds, "Don't tell anyone. And the Son of Man will suffer, be rejected by many leaders, killed, and rise again." To which Peter reacts, "No, Jesus, no, this is not good. I like talk of you as Messiah, but talk of you crucified and dead? No, no, no. . ." Jesus responds strongly and surprisingly, "Get behind me Satan, you are not setting your mind on divine things but human." Satan means "adversary." And in this case, Satan is human fear, anxiety, and short sightedness rather than divine patience and willingness to suffer.

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me. Those who want to save their life will lose it and those who lose their life for my sake and the gospel's, will save it.

In other words, this wise gospel path is to accept loss as it happens and to give life away rather than hoarding it. Embracing life. Allowing for change and loss. Accepting that death is letting go of precious certainties even while we continue to try our best to embrace life in this moment.

This is what it is to set one's mind on the things of God. It is a holy trust. Clinging to hope rather than the folks and stuff all around us. Much easier said than done. This Gospel life is not a matter of being a "better" person according to some human standard. Perhaps rather it is a matter of listening to God, and the folks, and the stuff with an open mind. Of being flexible toward those with whom you sit and stand and walk. Gospel is profound listening with communion. Recognizing that it's not "me against the world," but me in communion with all the rest. "Those who want to save their life will lose it. Those who lose their life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.

It's what we do when we start to brace ourselves against something we don't want, or fear, or do not trust. This bracing, clenched teeth, is usually much more about me and you, then about the Gospel. Think about it. When we brace ourselves against another person, is it because God is calling us to shun them, or is it that we are just afraid or anxious? How does the Gospel call us to approach them? With open ears and hands? "Those who want to save their life will lose it. Those who lose their life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.

Jesus fasting in the wilderness for 40 days taught him that there is more to life than eating, surviving and being comfortable. In his wanderings and wonderings, Jesus experiences that the wilderness is vast and does not depend on Jesus. Personally, Jesus lives the reality that he might feel that he is the center of the universe, but the universe will go on after he dies. We believe that Jesus is risen and his life and love lives beyond his death. The wilderness goes on whether he is wandering in it or not. Praying in the wilderness teaches us what matters. It teaches us patience. It teaches to be flexible. "Those who want to save their life will lose it. Those who lose their life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.

We, too, must experience the wilderness. In our lives we must wander and wonder in the wilderness too. And learn that all of this will go on without us. And learn that we are free to let go of the need to be in control, of the need to live in these mortal bodies forever, to be able to execute our carefully made plans. We are free to release it all into the mercy of God. "Those who want to save their life will lose it. Those who lose their life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.

Jesus' statement is a Lenten challenge to let go of the stuff we cannot change, even as we embrace the opportunities right now to love and practice justice. Thanks be to God.