

*Jeremiah 31:31-34*

*31 The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 32 It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt--a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. 33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.*

*John 12:20-33*

*20 Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. 21 They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." 22 Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. 23 Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25 Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. 27 "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say--' Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." 29 The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." 30 Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. 31 Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. 32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." 33 He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.*

Before the days of the US Coast Guard, crude life-saving stations dotted the treacherous coastlines. These life-saving stations were rough shacks that held a few boats and a crew of trained and dedicated men who risked their own lives to offer rescue to the many ships and boats that succumbed to storms and shifting sandbars.

A friend of mine used to tell a story about one of these life-saving stations and how, over time, some of the men got tired of sitting in the little shack, cold and uncomfortable, so they decided to build a new station. This one was nicer. It had thicker walls and warm stove. They replaced the cots with beds, exchanged the straight back chairs for cushioned ones, and included on a large, comfortable room where they could gather for meals and training. The new comforts brought new people and soon the large, comfortable room became a gathering spot for storytelling and parties, instead of watching and training.

It wasn't long before no one really wanted to leave the comfort of the life-saving station anymore, they didn't want to risk their lives anymore, so they hired other people to do that. Then it wasn't long before they didn't want to bring the dirty, injured, sometimes

“undesirable” shipwreck victims into their nice comfortable station...so they built a little shack and moved the sign and called it a Life-Saving station...because the original station had now become a club in which to belong, not a mission in which to serve.

It can be a shockingly short distance to travel from risk-taking mission to comfortable self-indulgence. Jesus spends his final days on his journey to the cross warning us about this. He’s trying to convince his followers to pay attention to the journey he’s on, because it is a journey he wants us to follow.

*12:24 Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25 Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.*

Here's the thing, most of us are trying to make sense of this from the comfort of the club rather than the risk-taking danger of the life-saving station. One of the reasons that Lent is an important time for the church is that it encourages us to let go of some of the things that we find comfortable and step into the uncomfortable spot of daring to see the truth of what is going on around us...and storms that have gathered around us, or maybe even within us. Let’s get uncomfortable for a minute. Let’s get back into the life-saving station and look at this story again.

The waves of this storm have been building for a few chapters of John’s gospel. Jesus and the Jewish leaders are growing further apart, Jesus and the Jewish people are growing closer together. Tension is building, the air is thick with it. Jesus has just left Mary and Martha’s house where the crowds have been gathering, not to see him, but to see Lazarus, whom he raised from the dead after several days in the tomb. Some are angry, some are following, some are curiously gawking...but few are understanding what exactly is happening. Now Jesus has entered Jerusalem, and in the midst of the building storm come some Greek tourists. The only way we know this is significant is that this one fact launches Jesus into another farewell discourse – he reminds his followers again that he is on a journey that seems filled with risk, death, suffering – but why?

Much of Jesus’ story is centered among the Jewish people. He is, after all, the Messiah that was promised. Earlier, Jim read from Jeremiah - “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more” - We can’t help but think of Jesus when we hear this promise– the son who comes so that we can know the

Father. We can't help thinking of the Holy Spirit – the one written in our hearts that draws us to God always.

Jesus is the fulfillment of Jewish promise, a blessing meant to be a blessing to who? According to scripture – to all nations. When the Greeks show up and ask to see Jesus, it implies that all nations are watching...all nations are ready...all nations want to see Jesus...the hour that was promised is at hand.

So, the world is watching, what will they see?  
The one who mans the life-saving shack.

They will see the one who doesn't sit in palaces and deny the shipwrecked world but enters into its suffering and comes out glorious on the other side.

They will see the one who risks it all so that others might live...

They will see the one who then calls them, calls all of us,  
to follow in that risk-taking mission.

“Those who love their lives lose it, those who hate their life will keep it.”

Jesus isn't asking us to hate our lives, to be intentionally miserable.

He isn't asking us to die a physical death for the sake of suffering.

He is asking us to man the life-saving station and resist the temptation to build the country club. Jesus is asking us to hold our own life loosely, to not take ourselves so seriously that we deny or ignore the needs of those who are being crushed under the waves while we rest comfortably on the shore.

Jesus is asking us to recognize that in his death comes the fruitfulness of resurrection. When Jesus dies, he dies the death of the poor, the oppressed, the victims of injustice, the cast out and marginalized...but when he lives again, the glory which rises with him...reverses that death...it doesn't erase it, the scars remain...the death happened...but life overcame it...life subdued it...life set it right again...and God is glorified in the living.

Jesus said, whoever serves me must follow me and then, where I am, there my servant will be also. As we move into Holy Week, we need to pay close attention to the steps Jesus takes on this journey, because our feet are meant to fill those footsteps as well.

It is not our mission, church, to watch the world crash and burn like a ship dashed on the rocks. It is our mission to man the life-saving station, crude and uncomfortable though it may be. It is our mission to be fruit of the single grain of Christ, fallen, broken open, and lifted up. It is our mission to hold our own life loosely, so that we can hold

Christ's life firmly. It is our mission to lift high the cross and walk the resurrection steps that lead to an everlasting savior.

This isn't a journey for the comfortable and complacent, it is a journey for the convicted disciple who isn't afraid to jump in the boat and enter the angry waves of the world in order to bring the drowning safely to shore. Whoever serves the savior, must follow the savior.

Let us pray:

Mighty and glorious God,

We look at the raging waves of the world, and we are tempted to cower.

The problems we see feel powerful enough to overwhelm us,

the wars seem too bloody, the poverty seems too permanent,

the sickness seems too fatal, the racism seems too rooted,

the hatred seems too ingrained, the power and oppression too irresistible.

It is far easier to create a comfortable place to hide and ignore the cries of drowning.

As our Lenten journey continues, help us to see that Jesus hears our cries,

was willing to jump into the suffering of the world and work for peace, abundance,

healing, acceptance, love, and shared power. Help us to see that Jesus never sought

the comfortable place, but lived instead in the challenging places that made a

difference, and saved the world.

Help us to see and to choose wisely the steps we will follow,

so that we will find that where Jesus is, there we are also.

Amen.