

Palm Sunday- The Life Carrying the Cross Matthew 16: 24-28

My family had worship service at home at around 10:40 last Sunday. The time of worship was 10:30, but since my kids were late, they came to worship service straight out of bed. I told them to come after they clean up.

As I was waiting for my kids to get ready last Sunday, our congregation came to my mind. Due to the Coronavirus, we had an online service at home because we couldn't have service together in the church due to social distancing. Although we had service at home, not in the church, it was clear to me that our Lord is still here. In Matthew 18:20 the Lord said: "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

That's right. The Lord is here where we worship, even at home, and He receives our worship. The Lord fills our needs and meets us through our worship service even though we are at home. I hope that we will experience the presence of the Lord in our service at home.

Today is Palm Sunday, the first day of passion week. Jesus' suffering began this afternoon and continued until Friday, which is why this week is called passion week or holy week. From a Christian standpoint, it is the most pious, solemn, and meaningful week of the year.

On Palm Sunday, two thousand years ago, Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem on a donkey. At that time, the crowd laid their clothes on the road, picked up palm branches, and cheered for Jesus as their Savior, King, Messiah. In early church history, it was said that churches marched through the city with palm branches on this day. In the future, people called that day, 'Palm Sunday,' in celebration.

During this passion week, let us hope that it will be the time to think about the cross of Jesus. What is the life of carrying the cross? Specifically, what does that life require of us? And what do we do to meet those requirements? I would like to share with you my thoughts on this matter.

1. We must deny ourselves.

As long as we live, we must deny ourselves to take the cross.

There are two important ways to deny ourselves. The first is to abandon our pride and the second is to be humble.

First, we must abandon pride.

We must abandon our pride before God, before humans, and before ourselves.

Proverbs 9:19 says. "If you are wise, your wisdom will reward you; if you are a mocker, you alone will suffer." In this bible passage, the word 'mocker' means a man full of pride. If you are such a man, you alone will suffer.

Proverbs 27: 1 says. "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth."

Humans are not perfect. According to Apostle Paul, we humans are a fragile bowl made of clay. However, most people are proud that they have learned lots, have wealth and good health, and have a high position. It is human beings who do not know when they will die. Therefore, we must be humble before God.

The author of James asks us in James 4:12. **“There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you--who are you to judge your neighbor?”** Those who cannot deny themselves are proud, and those who cannot give up their pride are those who judge their neighbors.

The psalmist warns us in Psalms 101: 5: **“Whoever slanders his neighbor in secret, him will I put to silence; whoever has haughty eyes and a proud heart, him will I not endure.”** St. Augustine said “I prefer tearful sinners to proud angels.” The proud angel was condemned, driven away from God, and came to this world to become Satan. We should live a life of self-denial. This is the first word we should remember today, on Palm Sunday.

Second, we must be humble.

The psalmist says in Psalms 116: 6, **“The LORD protects the simplehearted; when I was in great need, he saved me.”**

The author of James proclaims in James 4:10. **“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”**

Apostle Peter exhorts in 1 Peter 5: 6: **“Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.”**

The greater a person is, the more humility they have. A person of good faith, such as Apostle Paul, refers to himself in Ephesians 3: 8. **“I am less than the least of all God's people.”** God does not regard those who consider themselves wise in their hearts as in Job 37:24.

Do you want to live a life of self-denial? If so, you should think about what it truly means to be humble.

The prophet Zechariah describes Jesus' humility in Zech. 9: 9. **“Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”** This is the prophecy stating that Jesus would enter Jerusalem on a donkey on Palm Sunday. The way to deny ourselves is to be humble like how Jesus rode a colt not a gorgeous white horse.

2. We must take the cross given to us.

God is omnipotent and omniscient. He is not one who randomly gives a cross that we cannot handle. God gives us the most suitable cross.

A man was always dissatisfied with the cross he was given. Once he met Jesus in his dream and complained to Jesus, “My cross is wrong for me!”

Jesus spoke to the man pointing at the different types of crosses around him with no change of expression in his face. "Choose a cross that is right for you." The man was happy. Finally, he was able to choose the right cross. He was sweating, trying to choose the one that was right for him. Some were the right size but rough. Some were too heavy to look good. He searched all day, but the cross that suited him did not appear easily. Then, at sunset, he finally found a cross that was right for him. And he exclaimed "Jesus found it." Jesus, who was looking at him then said. "That is the cross I gave you." The Lord has given us the right cross. Now we must take the cross that we have been entrusted with and follow the Lord. We should not complain because the Lord has given us a suitable cross.

Some people misunderstand the meaning of the word cross. Some think that it is the cross that they must suffer for, but the cross is not about suffering for us, but "suffering for Jesus Christ". In other words, 'suffering for the glory of God' is to take the cross.

3. Therefore, to carry the cross means to follow Jesus Christ.

In order to pursue Jesus, who took the sins of the world and climbed the hills of Golgotha, it means that we must take the cross.

We, Christians, are people who believe in the merits of blood of Jesus. Those who believe in the merits of blood of Jesus are like our people of faith, as said in Leviticus 17: 11. "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life." The precious blood of Jesus Christ, shed from the innocent lamb, has atoned for our sins.

Apostle Peter tells us in 1 Peter 2:21 that we should follow the Lord. "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."

When Napoleon was exiled on the island of Helena and was in the last years of his life, he said the well-known phrase. "I tried to conquer the world with a knife, but I failed. Yet Jesus conquered the world with a cross."

When Jesus carried the cross to his grave, the robbers who ran with him on both sides took his cross for their sins. Prior to that, Simon from Cyrene was forced to take a cross he didn't want to carry. However, unlike Simon, our Lord, Jesus Christ, volunteered to take his cross with a loving heart for us.

The grace of the Lord is greater than any other word or thing in the world. Therefore, we must think of the love of Jesus through the cross that he has given us. We must also take the cross given to us with joy and gratitude in order to follow Jesus Christ during this difficult times.

Amen.

Let us pray!

Loving God, thank you for giving us this wonderful weather and for the chance to worship only you at home. Today is Palm Sunday, the first day of passion week. May this be a week of renewal for our faith by the reminder of the sufferings you endured on the cross. May this week be a week to think of You, who climbed the hill with a cross to forgive our sins. Help us to carry our own cross given to us so that we may follow you. Lord, let us be children of faith who think of only Jesus, and thank Him even through difficulties and adversities, sicknesses and heartaches, or even economic difficulties. Give and guide us in order to help us remember that there will be no resurrection without suffering. Let us be children who happily carry the cross given to us. Above all, Help us to give up our pride and be humble children of You. So, as Your children, let us stand firm in faith and be the children who receive your blessings. We pray in the name of Jesus, Amen.