

St. Matthew's Lutheran Church & School
17th Sunday after Pentecost
Year B
Mark 8:27-35
September 26, 2021

Sermon: Mark 8:27-35
“A Lesson in the Necessity of the Cross”

I was in the basement of the church I previously served getting ready to start a Sunday school teachers' meeting. My wife was also supposed to be at the meeting also, but she wasn't. Shortly after the meeting started my phone rang and I looked at it to see that she was calling me. I answered the phone expecting her to tell me that she was running late for the meeting, and she would be there shortly. That phone call was the beginning of what would be a major shift of reality for our family. She had taken our twins in for their four-year-old checkup earlier in the day and told the doctor that Eli was experiencing things that weren't quite right. The doctor ordered blood work to be done. When the results came back a few hours later the office promptly called Heather and said, "You need to get Eli straight to the ER right now. His blood sugar number is off the charts." I met them at the hospital. After a few anxious moments it came time to put the IV in his arm. The nurse said, "Dad, I need you to hold him down. We are going to give this one shot and if we can't get it, then we are going to need to do what we need to do to get this in." I held Eli down on the table as they put the needle in his little arm as he stared right into my eyes screaming. Little did he know that was just the beginning. He was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes, which means his body is 100% insulin dependent. Every time he would eat from that day forward, he needs insulin for his body to convert the food into usable energy for his body to live and function. It didn't take Eli long to figure out that every time he ate meant he was going to get a shot. After about a day when the nurse came in the room and asked what he wanted to order to eat he would say, "I'm not hungry. I don't want to eat." The response was, "You need to eat buddy." "Am I going to get a shot? Don't let them give me a shot. I promise I'll be a good boy, just don't let them give me a shot." How do you look your four-year-old in the eye and tell them, "You have to have the shots buddy? The shots are keeping you from getting sick. The shots are keeping you alive." He can't understand that. That's a concept beyond his ability to grasp that the pain was necessary, the pain had to happen." As a four-year-old he was only focused on the pain and not the larger picture. There are times when we learn that pain is necessary, that it can't be avoided. That's a lesson learned not just in hospital rooms, but it was a lesson that Jesus had to teach his disciples too.

The lesson that pain and suffering is necessary at times is often a lesson that we want to skip. We want to act like water. If you run water out of a garden hose, what path does it take. It takes the path of least resistance. If there is a rock in the way to doesn't go through the rock. It can't, it's too difficult. It takes the path of least resistance and flows around it. If there is pain in our way or suffering, then we want to be like water and go around it.

The pain was off the charts in the path of Jesus. There was no mistaking where it would be and how it would happen. One from his inner circle, the select twelve who was with him from the start, would sell Jesus for a handful of shiny, clanking coins. Oh, there would be pain. God's chosen people from the Old Testament, the nation set apart from whom the stump of Jesse would sprout would spew, "Crucify." There will be pain. He would be exalted in the most humiliating way, pounded to a cross for the world to mock. There will be pain. Then came the worst of it as your sins, my sins, and the sins of the world were heaped on his back as his Father turned his away from his son. There will be pain and it was necessary. What really makes us stop with all of this is for whom it was necessary. It wasn't necessary for Jesus. He didn't need to do it for himself. There was no gain for himself through the cross. The necessity of the cross and suffering is for you and me. It was a must for you and me. Scripture could not be clearer: there is no forgiveness apart from Christ's cross for us.

That was a truth Peter didn't grasp yet. Peter wanted nothing to do with the pain and suffering. Not for him and not for Jesus. "*He (Jesus) spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.*" (Mark 8:32). As if Jesus needed a private lesson from Peter. Maybe Jesus just needed a reminder that there was no reason for him to face suffering and pain. Why should he? Look at the glory! Look at the miracles! Look at

the crowds! Look at the popularity! Let's keep this rolling. Let's really start building our influence and see how big we can get the crowds. No, Jesus, no more pain and suffering. Let's make like water and take the path of least resistance. And if we were there, would we have joined in with Peter in rebuking Jesus? "Just stop all of that nonsense about suffering and dying Jesus." If we were there, would we have prayed for Jesus to skip the suffering? Would we have prayed for Jesus to escape the cross?

"But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter, "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." (Mark 8:32). Those words stung Peter worse than stepping on a hive of ground bees. Jesus identifies where this thought of avoiding the cross came from: Satan himself. But it sounded so good. Who wants to suffer? Who wants to go through pain? Who wants to suffer? Who wants to take shots? Raise your hand if you love pain and suffering and can't wait to go through more. It seems like Peter makes so much sense. But those are human thoughts. Those are the thoughts of a four-year-old that can only see the pain and not the bigger picture.

If I gave in to the cries of my four-year-old that begged me to stop the shots, to stop the pain, he wouldn't be here today. The shots had to happen to give his body what is needed to stay alive. The pain had to happen even if he couldn't understand that. Just for a moment imagine if Jesus had taken Peter's advice. "You know what Peter, you're right. I don't know what got into me with all the suffering and dying talk, and it wasn't even for myself. I'll just let everyone else pay for their sin because I want to skip the pain." Do you realize how eternally punishing that would have been for us? There would be no hope. There would be no heaven. Period. Let that sink in.

Jesus' cross is a necessary cross. It was a cross weighted down with the sins of the world. It had your sins and my sins on it, every single one of them. It was the heaviest weight to bear and the worst suffering for the payment for our sin and he did it perfectly. Think of the times we stumble and when the pain is too much. Think of the times we just want to give up. Jesus never did. It was never too much for him. And he knew how heavy it was going to be! It wasn't a shock to him. He never wavered in his love for us even when we waver from him. That's why Christ's cross was necessary for us.

Jesus also has some sobering news for us today. *"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it." (Mark 8:34, 35)* Jesus tells us today that the cross was necessary for him, but it is also necessary for the Christian, for us. Denying myself, that is my sinful nature, is painful, but necessary as I follow Christ. That cross never earns me forgiveness, but is always a result of Christ's cross. The pain comes when the sinful nature elbows and shoves itself to the front and says, "Don't listen to the Word. That's so restrictive. Do what makes you happy and makes you feel good. That's what will serve you. The forbidden fruit looks so good and who says its forbidden anyway?" Saying no to that brings pain because that's what our sinful nature wants to do. Then the reality hits in those moments when we haven't denied self and instead, we have given in to the sinful nature and gorged at the feeding trough of sin. That reality drives us to our knees in despair of our works and what we can do and sends us to the cross of Christ where we see the depth of his love shown for us, that he would do that for you and me.

There are times when pain is necessary even when we don't want to go through it or face it. There are times when we would rather take the path of least resistance. Thanks to God that Jesus didn't do that. Christ's cross was necessary for us to have life. The pain and suffering we face because we follow Christ are necessary, not because it earns us anything, but it is simply the result of following our Savior in a fallen world. Amen.