

New St. James Presbyterian Church
Sunday, August 30, 2020
Rev. Mark McLennan

“I AIN’T GONNA LIE TO YA”

Scripture Readings:

Exodus 3:1–15

Psalms 105: 1–6, 23–26, 45b

Romans 12:9–21

Matthew 16: 21–28

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INTERVIEW IN EARLY 2008 – Search Committee – Knox, Woodstock

I said to them directly: *“What you see is what you get”* - no hidden agendas.

I was reminded of this when I read today’s Gospel Lesson from Matthew 16

Jesus ministry – well under way – healing, teaching, challenging authority, creating the Gospel - the good news we share.

In Matthew’s story – Jesus has in recent days:

Fed the 5000 men

walked on water,

healed lots of sick folks

He has:

taught them what defiles a person

argued with a Canaanite woman

Fed 4000 more people

warned them about the religious leaders

Peter has identified him as the **Christ** – the **Messiah**, the Son of the Living God.

In today’s story, Jesus is telling his friends what lies ahead – for him, and for them.

He tells them:

He is going to Jerusalem, where the elders and chief priests and scribes will cause Him to suffer greatly.

He will be killed and then raised from death after three days.

Jesus is giving it to them straight.

I can hear him saying *“I AM NOT GOING TO LIE TO YOU....”*

Guess who jumps in at this point – **PETER** - **AGAIN!!**

Just like he always does – Peter enters the conversation

Professor Micah Jackson calls him the *“ever-loving, fiercely loyal, hot-headed, Never-able- to- plan- much- beyond- the- end -of -his- arm Peter.”*

Peter - *“God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.”*

We live in Canada in the 21st century.

It is unlikely that you will literally have to die for the sake of the Gospel.

Possible, I suppose, - but unlikely.

But that is not the only way to die.

Following Jesus – you will be doing all kinds of things you didn't expect.

You might have said *"I would never be caught dead doing that..."*

- Have lunch with a homeless person
- Ride herd on a Sunday School group
- Change a diaper in the nursery
- Listen to stories of abuse from a stranger
- Hold the hand of someone near death and cry with the family afterwards

"If I had to do that...I would just die..."

As a follower of Jesus, you may be called to do just these things, and yes... you will die.

The person you used to be before God called you – will die.

Then God will resurrect you into a life more wonderful than you can possibly imagine.

Following Christ, you will lose your life, but if you give it up for the love of God and for the sake of the Gospel, you will gain your life:

- your real life – the one God has set aside for you here on earth and in heaven.

I AM NOT GONNA LIE TO YOU...

Here is another hard teaching:

This life of sacrificial service that requires the death of the self you knew before, is not something to be done only by those who are strong in the faith.

The preachers and elders, the pastors and the teachers, we are called to give our lives, to endanger ourselves for the sake of the Gospel – yes –

But so are you...

Even if you are hearing this good news for the first time, or if you have been wondering for years what Christian discipleship really means,

If you want to be my followers – deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me.

Believe in Jesus

Bend down and pick up your cross

Don't forget to bend your knees – those crosses can be heavy....

Then get in line – with the rest of us – we are all following Christ to Calvary straight through to the crucifixion....and on to whatever God has in store for us.

German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote from prison, as he faced suffering with great faith:

“What remains for us is only the very narrow path, sometimes barely discernible, of taking each day as if it were the last and yet living it faithfully and responsibly as if there were yet to be a great future.”

This is the **divine** way.

It is also the **human** way.

I AM NOT GONNA LIE TO YOU.

There it is...

IN THE NAME OF THE CREATOR , CHRIST, AND SPIRIT.... AMEN

Call to Worship

(based on Psalm 22, Psalm 71:12, Matthew 16:24-26, Mark 8:31-38)

We worship this morning from different places.

We worship this morning for different reasons.

We experience the presence of the Spirit in different ways.

We hear Jesus' words with different ears.

“Deny yourselves.” “Take up your cross.” “Follow me.”

O God, we thank you for drawing near to us where we are, in our lives.

Amen.

Prayer of Approach

Good morning heavenly Father, good morning Lord Jesus,
good morning Holy Spirit.

Heavenly Father, I worship you as the creator and sustainer of the universe.

Lord Jesus, I worship you, Savior and Lord of the world.

Holy Spirit, I worship you, sanctifier of the people of God.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

Heavenly Father, I pray that I may live this day in your presence and please you more and more.

Lord Jesus, I pray that this day I may take up my cross and follow you.

Holy Spirit, I pray that this day you will fill me with yourself and cause your fruit to ripen in my life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Holy, blessed and glorious Trinity, three persons in one God,
have mercy upon me. Amen.

Words of Assurance

(based on Exodus 3: 1-15; Psalm 105: 1-6, 23-26; Rom. 12: 17-21)

The blazing fire of God's presence refines us,
but in mercy it does not destroy us.
God does not repay evil for evil,
but comes to deliver us and restore us to life.

Sisters and brothers,
..... your sins are forgiven;
..... be at peace.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Today, Lord, I once again take up my cross and follow you.

Forgive me for choosing daily to be complacent.
Happiness has been my god and I have believed I'm entitled to it.
Forgive me for all the excuses I have for not responding to you immediately, with urgency,
and sacrificially.
Forgive me for complaining about being bored as I sit and do nothing.

Forgive me for the times I have tried to make carrying my cross more comfortable.
I have been too concerned with finding things to make it easier;
gadgets and toys to make my cross lighter, smaller, and cushioned.
Forgive me for making excuses and not going with you because I was worried about my
health, safety, reputation, loneliness, financial security, and ability to handle extreme weather
and getting dirty.
Forgive me for focusing on my comfort rather than my character.

Forgive me for the times I have not followed you because it wasn't convenient.
I didn't want to go out of my way to see the needs around me because then I would feel guilty
for not doing something about them.
Forgive me for not loving my neighbors— I don't even know their names.
Forgive me for trying to pacify my conscience by giving just enough to feel good about myself
but not enough to inconvenience my lifestyle.

Today, Lord, I once again take up my cross and follow you.
Shake me of my complacency; I want to live daily with an urgency to radically be the change
you call me to be.
Strip me of my comforts; may my love for you be a driving force to live with joyful surrender.
Scratch out my schedule; I don't want my circumstances or timeline to influence my
dedication and obedience to take up my cross and follow you.
Here I am; Send Me.

May your word pour out of me like water to the thirsty, and may my life be full of the fruit of
the Spirit.

All I am and have I give back to you with open hands knowing that all my needs you will meet as I go with you.

Today I take up my cross and follow you. In Jesus Name, Amen.

OFFERING QUOTE

The riches of life are to be shared.

Life at its best is lived through giving, not getting; helping not hoarding.

Kennon Callahan (1936 -), pastor, author

Exodus Benediction

(inspired by Exodus 3)

Go out into the world to join God in the work of love, of peace, of justice.

Take in the breath of life. Take off your shoes.

Know that you are ever in the presence of the Holy and Living God.

Go in peace.

Amen.