

**WESTMINSTER CHURCH**  
THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA  
*Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario P6A 3B5*

*'Trusting God, nurturing disciples for Christ,  
being empowered by the Holy Spirit'*

**March 14th, 2021**  
**4rd Sunday of Lent**

**...We Gather to Worship God...**

**Call to Worship:**

We follow Christ,  
Who says take up your cross.  
We follow Christ,  
Who bids us come and offer our lives.  
We follow Christ,  
Who summons us to new life.  
Come, let us worship our Creator.

**Hymn:** And can it be that I should gain - 352

**Prayer**

Though people may turn their backs on us, you do not hide your face from us. Though others may try to take away our hope, you assure us of that future waiting for us. You speak your name, Inscrutable Creator, and it is enough.

When we try to dictate our fears to you, you invite us to follow you into self-denial and service. As we struggle to shape our lifestyle to yours, you carry us with you wherever we go. You speak your good news, Teacher of open hearts, and it is enough.

Though we have done nothing to earn them, you pour out the gifts of grace and mercy upon us. When we stumble over our lack of trust, you set us back on our feet, to follow you into the kingdom. You speak your peace, Breath of Holiness, and it is enough.

God in Community, Holy in One, it is enough that you hear us even as we pray as we are taught, Our Father . . .

**...We Listen to God's Word...**

**Word of God:**

**New Testament:** Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16, Mark 8:31-38

**Hymn:** Take up your cross - #211

## **Message: You are the Messiah**

Who do you follow? Why do you follow them? It is the Brier. Sault Ste Marie has a team so I follow the Brad Jacob's rink. I mean they are even a gold medal team. They are worth following. I know that they are not the media darlings like some of the other teams. They are too loud and too intense. I have heard them being accused of being intent on winning. At least the Jacob's team is not trying to be more than who they are.

But maybe curling is not your game. Maybe sports are not your thing. Maybe you found yourself following the life of Harry and Meghan this week. It seemed to be difficult to avoid it among my fb friends this week. I have wondered about people's interest in them. Do they follow because they wish they were them? Do they follow so they can say even royals have misery in their lives? In other words - Do they follow so that they can say 'money does not solve everything'? At least Meghan and Harry are not trying to be the perfect couple.

Who do we follow? I have followed many Christian leaders in my life. I think that we were even encouraged in Bible College to follow someone. See them as a mentor. I have often admired someone's work and even tried to emulate some of what they had done. They set themselves up to be Christian mentors and many around them encouraged this status. They were willing to accept the brand as a model Christian. Then I found out that they had a private life that did not match their public life. So frustrating. I could name names but I will not because I could find someone in almost every five years of my career.

Who do we follow? Our scripture reading this morning leads to this question - Who do we follow? And if we are brave enough to answer like Peter, we follow the Messiah. Then we need to be sure we know what that means.

This all starts with the simple question from Jesus. Who do people say that I am? Well that was not difficult to answer. Some had said Elijah. Others had thought that John the Baptist had returned. Many were willing to say that Jesus was one of the prophets returned to be with God's people. That was a rather easy question to answer. Many were amazed at what Jesus had taught and what he had did.

Then Jesus asked the disciples directly. Who do you say that I am? Not who do you think that I am - but who are you willing to say that I am?

They had seen so many healings with Jesus. They had seen so many demonic spirits obey Jesus' command. They had seen two large crowds fed with a few loaves of bread. They had seen the wind and the rain listen to Jesus on more than one occasion. They were also sent out to help with the casting out of evil spirits and healings. They had been on such a fascinating journey with Jesus so far. He was clearly the Messiah and they were willing to claim him as such and follow.

The excitement of this claim of messiahship would be the creation of a movement, right? Tell everyone that not only do you think Jesus is the messiah, He has claimed to be the messiah. Imagine what this movement would be like. The movement might even turn into a revolt, a rebellion, a change in leadership. People would have to know. The disciples of such a person would have to be vocal. The person would have to be seen in public places. Amass large audiences. Make a video that would go viral. Gain power and notoriety. It would be hard work but would be very exciting!

Then Jesus told them to be silent about this amazing revelation. Then, Jesus began to teach them what being a messiah would truly mean. He would suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law. His reputation would be in tatters. He would be killed. Then in three days he would rise again.

It is no wonder that Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke Him. The disciples might have been able to work around the instruction to be silent about the messiahship. They could still talk about the stunning events that they had witnessed. However, Jesus' teaching about suffering, rejection and being killed. This was going to be a much more difficult marketing message. People do not easily rally around teachings of suffering, rejection and abandonment. Peter was sure that Jesus could do better. He took Jesus aside and gave Jesus some sharp criticism for His words. As someone pointed out, Peter was starting to style himself as a patron rather than a pupil. He was telling Jesus that he knew better about what Jesus should be teaching and saying than Jesus did.

No wonder Jesus rebukes Peter. He sees Peter getting caught up in the excitement of the possibilities. They would be making a religious stand and then maybe a political stand. Maybe a rebellion. Maybe they would be like the Maccabees. They could be the ones to fighting against the Romans. Look at the power of God was in Jesus. Everyone listens to his commands! People, wind, rain, evil spirits! Think what could be done! Then Jesus rebukes Peter.

We are very familiar with the Jesus' words "Get thee behind me, Satan." Not so familiar are Jesus' closing words to Peter, 'you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.'

Then we have these rather familiar words given by Jesus to the crowd about denying themselves and taking up their cross and following him.

And there's the question? Would I have been like Peter? Would I have been more interested in a Messiah who was more ego-centric? I think this is a really important question. We live in a time where people want a following. That is how they are earning an income, making a living. They work hard at putting themselves out there on the internet and making content in hopes that people will pay attention. That takes a certain amount of ego to do that. As many of you know, I follow the Raptors basketball team. I really enjoy

watching Fred Vanvleet because he is supposed to be too small and plays the wrong position to be a great player. But he is a great player. His motto, his brand is Boy. Bet on Yourself. People love this motto when he is playing well and is looking like a champion. It is fun and exciting.

Would I be more interested in a Messiah who had a brand that was catchy and looked like a winner? That is a tough question. It helps me to see why I was so frustrated with Christians who had a big name that I followed. I was wanting to follow the brand and the winner and they were willing to play that game. But this has not a win for either of us. Not for them who are concerned more about power and numbers than people and not for me who is let down again by someone's lifestyle.

Christ calls us to follow a different path. He calls us to follow him through suffering and shame. He calls us to pick up our cross and follow him. What does that look like?

I have just finished reading "Another long night" written by a friend and colleague Rev. Marilyn Savage. It is an account of two to three weeks of her life with her daughter last spring. Just as the covid-19 was shutting down hospitals, her daughter, Joanna, suddenly had an extreme infection and had to be hospitalized. To make this situation more challenging, Joanna has Sotos syndrome which means she does not have normal cognitive function. When she is well, she is a fun, funny Christian woman who is outgoing and active and capable of reading and writing and participating in conversations. I think Marilyn would approve of this description. All of this is to say, when Joanna is in hospital and not well, she needs someone who knows her well to be her advocate, someone who is able to tell the nurses who Joanna is normally and to help Joanna know what is happening around her. This book is the story of Marilyn staying three weeks in the hospital with her daughter, never going outside, because she is scared that she will not be allowed back in to be her daughter's advocate. Three weeks of sleeping on chairs and awkward cots wondering if she was making the right decisions for her daughter who seemed to be slipping away.

I am pleased to say that the book has a happy ending - Joanna suddenly started to improve and fully recovered from the infection. She returned to her usual funny, fun, loving self. If there was someone I would want to emulate, it is Marilyn. There were decisions that she made which put her at odds with the doctors and staff. There were times that she got frustrated trying to explain to the nurses and staff that the person they saw in the bed was not the normal Joanna. Trying to answer the question that was asked more than once 'Was Marilyn sure that Joanna could actually feed herself?' in a kind, Christian way when Joanna was very capable of looking after herself in many ways when she was well. The person they were seeing in the hospital was not the Joanna that Marilyn knew and loved. Her book is a record of her life in those days, knowing that Christ was with her in this suffering. She held on to those words of hope that are in this passage - in three day's Christ would rise.

When we follow the Messiah, those words - after three days rise again - give hope. In

following Jesus through suffering we are able to hold on to resurrection in the coming kingdom even as the road is hard. The resurrection gives meaning to the suffering of the present time. This gives us a reason to draw close to people, to love them and be with them even when it is very difficult and we are not sure that we are not losing part of ourselves in the process.

Who do we follow? Who gives us true strength and hope for those tough days that come our way? Who do we follow? Who is really worthy of our praise? Of course, when we are here it is easy to say that the answer is Christ. Just like Peter, quick and simple. Like Peter, we also need to remember that this means suffering, humiliation and struggle and it also leads to forgiveness, reconciliation, resurrection and life. Who else offers that? Only Christ. Only and always Jesus Christ.

## **...We Respond in Service...**

### **Collection & Dedication**

**Let us present to God our tithes and offerings.**

**(At this time Session would like to encourage the congregation to consider several ways to continue your contributions to Westminster Church. If you are already on PAR (Pre-Authorized Remittance) we thank you for your continued support. You may use the regular mail. You may use the Brock Street mail slot and drop it off if you are passing by (cheques only please). You may use e-transfer to [office@westminsterchurch.ca](mailto:office@westminsterchurch.ca). You may prayerfully consider joining PAR. We thank you for your continued prayerful and monetary support of our mission at Westminster.)**

### **Prayers of the People:**

**O Lord, we give you thanks for the example of Abraham and for all the saints who have gone before us - for those who waited in patience for your promises to come to pass - for those who lived in hope while around them it seemed to be only darkness, for those who witnessed to you when it was not considered the proper thing to do, for those who forgot their own selves in their desire to obey your commands and respond to your call upon their lives. Help us today, O God, to examine the level of our faith - to look seriously at our resistance to talk about the cross and about sacrifice; and to consider in prayer our reluctance to give up the things of this world - to risk our reputations, our comfort, and our security for the sake of following you - for the sake of witnessing to you - for the sake of obeying you ....**

**Lord, hear our prayer, and in your love, answer.**

**We pray, O Lord, that you would make us bold in our faith. By our self-forgetting, our self-denial, help us make visible to all our brothers and sisters the reality of your power and care - that power and care that is so often made evident when we confess our weakness - and so often concealed from others when we are strong.....**

**Lord, hear our prayer, and in your love, answer.**

**We pray, O Lord, for those people whose names, or faces, or needs are resting upon our hearts – for the members of our church whose health is failing as they age – for those believers whose families are struggling to deal with teenage rebellion and adult confusion and uncertainty – for those who have little or no faith and who seem to be lost even though your light shines around them and your word is close to hand....**

**Lord, hear our prayer, and in your love, answer.**

**We pray, O Lord, for those in our family, our church, our community and our world that you bring to our hearts and minds at this time – and we hold them up to you praying that you would be with them and give them strength for their journey.**

**All these things we pray to, through your Son Jesus, who died that we might live, and who lives that we might never die. Amen.**

**Hymn:** Jesus calls us, o'er the tumult - #672

**Benediction:** Now as you go from here, may the grace, mercy and peace of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.