

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Rules. Don't you love rules? Don't you love the security that you receive from knowing what should be done and how to do it? We live in a chaotic world, a world where we need rules, laws, agreements as to how folks, companies, countries will get along. We know we like order, we like it when things happen in an orderly fashion. We don't care for the unpredictable. Maybe that's one reason we all pay attention to the weather reports, laugh at what's predicted, and either hope like crazy that the forecasters are wrong, or laugh at them when they are wrong.

So in our reading from Genesis, God gives us a promise, a covenant. God makes it pretty clear, he's our God, forever, and we and generations after us, will be comfortably secure. We know God is always faithful, but we get in the habit of trying to fit God into our own image, into our mold, into a box of our own making. And then we get into trouble.

Think of Peter in our gospel this morning. He doesn't like what Jesus is saying because what Jesus is saying doesn't fit in with Peter's expectations of the Messiah. He rebukes Jesus, trying to get Jesus to conform to Peter's image of Jesus, trying to fit Jesus into that mold that in his mind, he has prepared. We might shake our heads at Peter, but haven't we each of us occasionally done some variation of the same thing?

What do you mean give everything to the poor? What do you mean take up my cross and follow you? Treat others the way I want to be treated? That's simply not realistic. Love one another as you have loved me/us? Love my neighbor as myself? Do you know my neighbor!? Be perfect as my heavenly Father is perfect? You must be joking!

Like Peter we confess Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and a moment later, we want to conform Jesus to our own image. We have witnessed Jesus power and his love. Jesus has fulfilled the law that we can't keep, by his death and resurrection he has brought about a new covenant and he has invited us not only into the new covenant, but into life, real life, as well.

It's inviting, enticing, but it also makes us feel a little bit uneasy. Jesus willingly died for us and knowing he expects the same from us is a little bit, maybe a lot, intimidating, frightening. Oh we all know we're going to die someday, a physical death, but letting other things within us die before that physical death? The death of seeking comfort and security, the death of pride and ambition, the death of my ideas on what God should be doing for me.

So will we follow Jesus into death, are we willing to lose part of what we think makes who and what we are to die with him? We are invited into cross-bearing, and we know we can't save ourselves on our own. Hard work, grit, determination and will-power, that's not going to do it.

Here's the take home my friends. As the Apostle tells us in his letter to the Romans, "it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace..." Hoping against hope, Abraham believed and "his faith was reckoned to him as righteousness." Faith is the bridge God has created that leads from death on the cross to transformation, the new life promised in the resurrection. Faith that realizes the cost, the real cost of discipleship to which we are called by our Lord Jesus. It might literally include our very lives as is the case with many of our brothers and sisters in the Middle East who paid for their faith with their life. Most of us here this morning don't run that risk, we pick up and bear our cross, sometimes hardly moving at all, sometimes moving only by small steps, one action, one gift of ourselves to others, at a time.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." And so we give our lives in the service of others, following Jesus, willing adherents to his covenant of life, transformed servants, not rebuking Jesus, not trying to mold him into our own image. We let go of all this because he is making us more like him, a transformation and promise that is worth more than our lives.

AMEN