

Lent 2

February 25, 2018

St. Mark 8:31-38

God's Things are the Way of the Cross

Rev. George Ferch

Dear Friends in Christ,

One of my favorite movies is Men in Black. You may or may not know it is about a secret government agency that deals with life forms from other planets living on earth disguised as humans. In one scene a young police officer they are recruiting says he is going into a pawn shop, and lay his thing down. He means, do his work in his way. We have similar expressions like, "Do your own thing," or "That thing you do."

God the Father had work for his Son, Jesus, to do. Jesus referred to that work as "the things of God." Jesus would do his work in the way his Father wanted, the way of the cross. The same is true for us who come after him. In our work as Christians, as we do our thing, "the things of God," we go with Jesus on the way of the cross.

Jesus chose not to follow "the things of men," nor may we choose that way. **God's Things are the Way of the Cross.** It is the way for Christ. It is the way for us who come after Christ.

Our Savior changed his language at this time in his ministry. To his disciples, "He was speaking plainly to them." It was time for frank and clear facts rather than parables and figures of speech. There was no room for misunderstanding. For the first time, Jesus laid out the way of the cross he had to walk to ransom the world from sin and death.

"Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things; be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the experts in the law; be killed; and after three days rise again."

God's things are the way of the cross. This is the way for Christ.

The way of the cross was not the way Satan wanted Jesus to go. The cross meant Satan's total and utter defeat and destruction. The angel who fell from heaven and whose name means "Adversary" plotted against Jesus to have him do instead "the things of men." The things of men are the easy way, the painless way, the self-determined way. It is the way some translations call "not on God's side." The things of men are anything that weakens the fact of Christ's suffering and death.

Satan used the apostle Peter as the instrument of his plan. Peter earlier had confessed that Jesus is the Christ. Peter did not understand this meant the way of the cross. Satan used Peter's love for Jesus and this misunderstanding to have Peter take Jesus aside and rebuke his Lord for such a thought.

Peter believed he was doing the right thing. The right thing is never what goes against God's thing. Peter's way was the things of men. Jesus way was God's thing, the way of the cross. Jesus turned the rebuke around. After turning around to face all the disciples, Jesus said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan." This rebuke drove Satan away. Once again Jesus showed his power over temptation in order to go the way of the cross.

Soon, the religious leaders would test Jesus out as their Messiah. When Jesus failed the test to be a messiah in the things of men, they rejected him and killed him on Calvary's cross. In this passion, Jesus did the things of God and took the way of the cross. He also would rise again in three days having paid the horrible price for all your sins and mine. The way of the cross led to the empty tomb.

Jesus goes on to teach that God's way is the way of the cross for others. It is the way for us who come after Christ.

We are more closely attached to our Lord Jesus than we often realize, or, dare I say, want to be. Coming after Christ as his disciples means not doing our own things. It means doing God's things. It is walking the way of bearing our crosses. These crosses do not pay for sin as Jesus' cross did. These crosses come with leaving the things of men.

Jesus expanded his listeners before speaking these words. He gathered the larger crowd to him and his disciples. Again, Jesus speaks frankly so that no one who hears his words can misunderstand. That includes us. There is a clear choice and cost for every person. Following Christ carries the imperative to bear sufferings and burdens as Christians. Follow the world, ashamed of Christ, and the cost is bear Christ's shame on Judgment Day.

What does it mean to walk the way of the cross as a Christian? "Whoever wants to save his life, will lose it. Whoever loses his life for my sake and for the sake of the gospel, will save it." This is more than being killed for being a Christian. The word can mean life or soul. It means what I dedicate my soul to follow. Life is my outlook toward this world and the things in it. It is my worldview, either through the lens of God's Word, or through human wisdom and thought.

Jesus says if I hold tight to the things of men during my life now it will cost my soul for eternity. Jesus asks two questions about that. If I bank the things of this life, what have I really gained? Nothing, I have lost my soul. What worldly things I love can I give to God so he will save my soul? None, because the only thing that has saved my soul is the cross of Christ.

On the other hand, if I lose my life, give up worldliness and turn away from the idolatry of self-centeredness, for the sake of Christ and the gospel, then I save my soul. I keep my life for eternity with God in heaven. When Jesus comes on the final day, he will not be ashamed of me.

God's things are the way of the cross for both Christ and for us. The things of men are anything that weakens the message of Jesus' suffering and death, and resurrection as proof of our redemption. We are living in "an adulterous and sinful generation" that looks on the things of God as foolishness at least, mental illness at most. They think "the things of men" are righteous when in fact they are demonic.

We are strangers and aliens living for a time on planet earth. God has come to us and laid his thing down, done his work in his way. That way and work is the cross he placed on his only Son, Jesus Christ. It is the way of the cross for us who come after him. It is the way of faith in Jesus Christ that leads not to shame but to glory when the trumpet sounds, and the Son of Man appears on the clouds in the glory of his Father with his holy angels. Amen. <SDG>