

**St Paul United Church of Christ**  
**5312 Old Blue Rock Road**  
*Cincinnati, Ohio 45247*  
*Allen M. Fluent, Transitional Pastor*  
**Order of Worship for The Second Sunday in Lent**  
**February 28, 2021**

*(Although we are now holding worship in our building, we are conscious of the ongoing challenge of in-person worship while the coronavirus persists, and the need many feel to avoid the possibility of contagion. Therefore, we will be continuing the practice of sending a worship bulletin to all who are on our mailing lists for email or hard copy. Those who will be worshipping from home and who have computer access will also be receiving a recorded version of the service that will be sent out by email on Sunday afternoon and also can be seen on our Facebook page. We welcome your participation in any way that is convenient for you, and we encourage you to share our worship service with any person you know who may appreciate receiving it. )*

Morning Announcements and Prayer Requests

Prelude (recording begins)

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, by the prayer and discipline of Lent, may we enter into the mystery of Christ's suffering, and by following his way come to share in his glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Hymn

**"In the Cross of Christ I Glory"**

**#264**

***In the cross of Christ I glory, towering o'er the wrecks of time;  
all the light of sacred story gathers round its head sublime.***

***When the woes of life o'ertake me, hopes deceive and fears annoy,  
never shall the cross forsake me. Lo! It glows with peace and joy.***

***When the sun of bliss is beaming light and love upon my way,  
from the cross the radiance streaming adds more luster to the day.***

***Bane and blessing, pain and pleasure, by the cross are sanctified;  
peace is there that knows no measure, joys that thro' all time abide.***

**Responsive Litany** (*from Life in Liturgy, Christian Church, Disciples of Christ, adapted*)

*Once again in this season of Lent, we are summoned by a gracious and merciful God.*

***We respond to God's steadfast love, calling us into solemn assembly.***

*Let us bow before the One who is always creating the world anew.*

***We approach God in reverence and wonder, rejoicing in the invitation to holy places.***

*Walk humbly before God in secret disciplines, in prayer, in fasting and giving.*

***We seek the One who grants us life, upholding us each day.***

Hymn

**"My Faith Looks Up to Thee"**

**#419**

***My faith looks up to thee, thou Lamb of Calvary, Savior divine!***

***Now hear me while I pray, take all my guilt away;***

***O let me from this day be wholly thine!***

***May thy rich grace impart strength to my fainting heart, my zeal inspire;***

***as thou hast died for me, O may my love to thee***

***pure, warm and changeless be, a living fire!***

***While life's dark maze I tread, and griefs around me spread, be thou my guide;***

***bid darkness turn to day, wipe sorrow's tears away,***

***nor ever let me stray from thee aside.***

***When ends life's transient dream, when death's cold, sullen stream shall o'er me roll;***  
***blest Savior, then, in love, fear and distrust remove;***

***O bear me safe above, a ransomed soul!***

**Gospel Lesson: Mark 8:31-38**

*Then Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."*

*He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world*

*and forfeit their life? Indeed what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”*

Sermon:

Christians, like all people of good will, are called upon by their conscience to do good things and make sacrifices for others. But Jesus realizes in his teachings that, before we can do good things, human beings need to know how to let loose of those attachments of life that make them afraid of what they will lose.

Today's story from Mark's Gospel, of course, goes even beyond that, reminding us that the world Jesus and his followers were living in was one that punished with death anyone who dared to take a stand for people who were suffering under oppression. It is not surprising that Peter wants to persuade Jesus to disengage from a plan that will surely cause him to die at the hands of the Jerusalem authorities. But Jesus cannot be dissuaded. He sees himself to be on a heavenly mission that he cannot set aside because of its danger to him personally. He goes on, moreover, to say that those who follow him should have the same willingness to deny their own individual welfare as he does, for the sake of restoring the creation in the image of the God of love, who created it to be a garden of love and peace for all.

Then, suddenly, Jesus surprises us, talking in the language of economics – profit and loss. What will it profit you, he asks, if you gain the whole world but forfeit your life? The question must have surprised his hearers, as it surely surprises us: is this not the man who just told us he was on a mission that would end in his death at the hands of the Romans and the Temple authorities in Jerusalem? But Jesus has changed the definition of “life.” He is no more talking about mortal existence – the short space of years we have before death claims us. He is talking now about the immortal soul that grows and blossoms and transmits its gifts only when it is generously shared with others. The life of the soul, living generously in the world, looks at the life that lives only to protect itself, and sees nothing but death, because the selfish life has nothing to live for. Even if it devours the whole world for itself, it is still empty and its purposes are futile.

For Jesus, these are religious truths, and generosity is the central characteristic of life truly lived. Generosity to the point of selflessness is the way of ecstatic fulfillment. One would think that something this religious would have no practical significance. But that would not be so.

There is a reason why “Love your neighbor as yourself” is a universal religious commandment. There is nothing that has ever been imagined that has the life sustaining power of this simple rule. The reason for this is simple: it is infinitely easier to be safe and well

in a place where people love each other than it is to be safe and well in a place where everybody is armed for protection against their neighbors.

Likewise, life in modern society is filled with parables about the benefits of putting others ahead of ourselves. A good example is in the news this week. As the life-saving vaccines against the corona virus have been rolling out, the nations of the developed world have been eager to get the vaccines for their own people. As is often the case, however, there has been a slower effort to take the vaccines to many areas of the world that cannot pay the cost. As a consequence, we're now hearing that some variants of the virus are growing in areas of the world where the vaccines are not yet available. The lesson is clear: none of us are safe until all of us are safe!

When we read the story about how Jesus gave his life for the life of the world, it doesn't necessarily come to our minds that we might have to bear that kind of cost for our faith, or for the kind of world we believe in. But it is important to understand that Jesus' sacrifice, like that of many of his followers who gave their lives for a great cause, was not something that just happened at the end of his ministry. It was instead consistent with the life of compassion, healing and sharing that characterized his work from the very beginning. Following his example, he invites us to create the beloved community by generous living and neighborly compassion, so that life is full and unafraid.

Musical Interlude

Our Time of Prayer

God of the sacred journey, guide our footsteps as we seek the abundant life. Enable us to put aside the burdens that we carry in our effort to accumulate more than life needs. When we are tempted by insecurity or anxious about our lives, may we remember Jesus, who emptied himself, so that his life became full of the joy and hope and love that he inspired in those who followed him.

As Jesus has taught us, so we pray:

**Lord's Prayer**

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,  
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**

Closing Hymn

"I Have Decided to Follow Jesus"

#344

*I have decided to follow Jesus, I have decided to follow Jesus, I have decided to follow Jesus – no turning back, no turning back.*

*The world behind me, the cross before me, the world behind me, the cross before me, the world behind me, the cross before me – no turning back, no turning back.*

*Though none go with me, I still will follow, though none go with me, I still will follow, though none go with me, I still will follow – no turning back, no turning back.*

*Will you decide now to follow Jesus? Will you decide now to follow Jesus? Will you decide now to follow Jesus? - no turning back, no turning back.*

Benediction

*Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.*

Postlude