

# Your Inmost Self

Wayne Waibel – 09/12/2021

As stories go, this one holds particular relevance to our comings and goings on a daily basis. It perfectly encapsulates what a life in Christ is – and what it is not.

Much like the first disciples, we find ourselves wondering why the life we are commanded to lead contains so much misery and suffering. Peter even went so far as to rebuke Jesus because He did not fit the vision of what he expected of a Messiah. In Peter's mind, and I dare say in a few practicing religions even today – Jesus is considered a Warrior King. He came to champion the downtrodden and marginalized. The power and might of the Holy Spirit to say nothing of God Almighty was at His disposal.

It's no wonder that Peter was compelled to challenge Jesus. Up to this point – Jesus had not breathed a word of his identity to the disciples. That Peter would call him Messiah in Hebrew or Christ in Greek was astounding. He had the right answer, but he could not have been more wrong in interpretation.

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Here's this Messiah in whom he had infused all of his expectations for heroic and dignified exploits talking about being tortured and killed by those in power, then abandoned by His closest companions. You can understand why Peter was a little upset. But Peter was not thinking in spiritual terms – he was using his temporal lens.

Even though he knew the right answer to the question Jesus put before them, "Who do you say that I am?" He displayed his short sightedness by rebuking Jesus. The good news was that ultimately, upon His resurrection, Peter was able to ask forgiveness for not only abandoning Jesus, but denying he even knew Him – three times.

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We don't like to knowingly deny ourselves the comforts and conveniences of modern life. It seems unnatural to choose a life of sacrifice and suffering over bountiful or even excessive material gain.

Doctrinal confusion is not the Christian's fundamental problem. It is disobedience. Our refusal to accept Christ's authority over our lives.

Fear of the Lord does not mean sniveling terror before God. The phrase is an ancient code for the proper behavior of the religious person in relation to God and creation. It involves awe – respect – obedience; it summarizes righteous living.

People who fear the Lord have their feet planted firmly on the ground, have an uncanny knack for the truth all around them, and live in harmony with God and the world.

The path of discipleship is a process; it is not something you attain. It's a way of life. I think we all in our own way understand and probably even embrace that concept, but we can't help letting our minds wander into "what if" territory now and again.

I don't know that there's anything wrong with that necessarily, but we don't do ourselves any favors by lingering on that side of our thought process. In many ways – it makes glimpsing the eternal a lot more difficult.

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It's a simple direction, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." It's not complicated. It's not easy, but it's not impossible. The biggest obstacle is step one – deny yourself.

Jesus was beginning to train His disciples now for their life after His death and resurrection. He provides the recipe for exactly how to become a follower in clear and concise terms. It may be hard to hear, but the book of Proverbs and the wisdom literature of the time illuminates the path.

Wisdom invites everyone to a life of harmonious balance in the midst of daily life. To love the neighbor as the self is the way of wisdom in this world - and the next.

We clearly see at work in this chapter of Christ's life that God's life-giving power exceeds the worst that human hands can do. What we suffer at the hands of our oppressors becomes an opportunity for God to cloak us in life affirming love and grace. So, when Jesus tells us how to follow Him – He knows not only what He is asking of us, He knows what our actions will allow God to do for us.

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As we move further into the information age, we also move ever further into the disinformation age. An age where small things can produce very large and dangerous results. Like kneeling on the neck of someone until there is no life left in them. Like becoming so self-righteous that you reject as life-threatening the one medicine that will protect you.

Following Jesus faithfully will produce a quality of reverence in your inmost self that equips you for the unspeakable tragedies of life. I know that's not a popular aspiration in this culture that speaks the language of revenge very well, to a people often addicted to the hope of getting even. Simply remember yesterday – minus 20 years.

So how can we pick up our cross and follow Jesus? If the Amish community of Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania can forgive and embrace the family of the man who shot 10 of their little girls in a one room schoolhouse, killing 5 of them and himself back in October of 2006 - we have the capacity to lift up our cross and follow Him all day every day.

And as we stretch our faith and extend ourselves beyond what we thought possible, we'll find that the act of lifting that cross liberates us to a life-long journey of faith that honors our Master.

We are unlikely to be crucified, but we will pose a threat to the corrosive ideologies of this world. And no matter what befalls us on that journey – we know that “neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Amen.