

Shiloh United Methodist Church

Take Up Your Cross

Philippians 4:4-9
Luke 9:18-25,
Matthew 17:1-9

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Spoken Word:

In Philippians the book of our study these last 4 weeks we can find this scripture for today:

Philippians 4:4-9 Common English Bible (CEB)

⁴ Be glad in the Lord always! Again I say, be glad! ⁵ Let your gentleness show in your treatment of all people. The Lord is near. ⁶ Don't be anxious about anything; rather, bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks. ⁷ Then the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus.

⁸ From now on, brothers and sisters, if anything is excellent and if anything is admirable, focus your thoughts on these things: all that is true, all that is holy, all that is just, all that is pure, all that is lovely, and all that is worthy of praise. ⁹ Practice these things: whatever you learned, received, heard, or saw in us. The God of peace will be with you.

As we begin worship today, I invite us to breathe deeply, to center ourselves together in this space and know God's presence. Finally, as we listen to our opening introit I invite us to hunker down in the warmth of this place and trust that God will connect us across the divides that exist in the world.

Sermon:

Friends for the last 4 weeks we have studied Philippians, we have worked to let go of things that stand between us as brothers and sisters and things that separate us from God. We have repented of the fact that too often we put our preferences over the needs of others by seeking what we like only, we have let go of trusting the word's "I like" get us closer to God. We have released our need to be right and get ahead, by letting go of saying "I am right, or I am better." By letting these two things go we have learned that God is the only one that needs to be right in the end, and that being better only serves to shame and hide our neighbors from us. Finally, last week we let go of the phrase "I was" recognizing that sometimes our culture drives us to remember who we were, makes us crave getting back there and in so doing we forget who we are for this moment now, that we have gifts to offer God in this moment and at this time.

Many of you have written these on popsicle sticks and today those are all here on our altar side by side. This cross represent those things that get between us and God, we have put our sins on the altar of God and offered God to take them. We are going to keep this cross through Lent, in our public space. To remind us of the things we are all working on, to pray for one another and hope for one another the transformation of our lives in Christ.

The danger, the path towards sin and death is holding onto these things on our Cross, the things Paul has pointed out to us in the letter to the Philliipians, things that serve only to separate us from one another. To escape the trap that holding onto these things can do, we must learn to let them go. However, sometimes first we have to take them up as our cross. A cross that is not hidden from the world, but that when released slams across the divide and builds the bridge of Christ.

Our second scripture for today comes from the Gospel of Luke. In it Christ gives instructions for us to follow him in our daily lives.

Luke 9:18-25 Common English Bible (CEB)

¹⁸ Once when Jesus was praying by himself, the disciples joined him, and he asked them, “Who do the crowds say that I am?”

¹⁹ They answered, “John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others that one of the ancient prophets has come back to life.”

²⁰ He asked them, “And what about you? Who do you say that I am?”

Peter answered, “The Christ sent from God.”

²¹ Jesus gave them strict orders not to tell this to anyone. ²² He said, “The Human One must suffer many things and be rejected—by the elders, chief priests, and the legal experts—and be killed and be raised on the third day.”

²³ Jesus said to everyone, “All who want to come after me must say no to themselves, take up their cross daily, and follow me. ²⁴ All who want to save their lives will lose them. But all who lose their lives because of me will save them. ²⁵ What advantage do people have if they gain the whole world for themselves yet perish or lose their lives?

Friends, what advantage do we have if we gain the world through getting what we like, being right, being better, or getting back to who we once have been. We gain only a victory for an individual and then the moment is gone, but if we live our lives for our God then others will be able to grow in the love of God. We will build bridges for the current generation, and moment that will allow people to connect to one another.

I don't know if you know the story of the Brooklyn Bridge in New York, but it is important because it was the dream of connecting many people together and it only happened by trusting in the vision. Emily Roebling was born in 1943, in her age women were not meant to know science and engineering. However, she did not listen to who the world

thought would like her or how to she should be. She learned science and engineering anyway, which turned out to be a good thing. Emily married her husband Washington, whose father John Roebling was tasked with building the Brooklyn bridge.

John, Emily's father in law, died from an accident while scouting the bridge work. Washington, her husband, got the bends from working to inspect the caissons, and left him in bed unable to leave it. Emily could have withdrawn with her husband, but knowing the bridges importance she took notes from her husband, negotiated and made calls on the bridge. Without her willingness to trust her place and time, we likely would not have seen the Brooklyn Bridge completed as many thought it unworkable project. Letting go of what was, what was liked, being better, and being right, Emily did her best to support the place she was called to help build bridges.¹

Our final scripture today is the story of the transfiguration, because in the Christian calendar this is the day we celebrate the transfiguration. It is the mountaintop experience where three disciples ascend a mountain with Jesus. On the mountain they experience a vision of Jesus surrounded by light with two other key figures from the history of the Jewish people, Moses and the prophet Elijah. Then after hearing the voice of God they must return down the mountain to continue the work of following Christ and serving others.

(Go onto mountain top)

Hear the words from the gospel of Matthew, Chapter 17.

17 Six days later Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and brought them to the top of a very high mountain. **2** He was

¹ <http://mentalfloss.com/article/515792/emily-warren-roebling-woman-who-helped-build-brooklyn-bridge>

transformed in front of them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as light.

3 Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Jesus. **4** Peter reacted to all of this by saying to Jesus, “Lord, it’s good that we’re here. If you want, I’ll make three shrines: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”

5 While he was still speaking, look, a bright cloud overshadowed them. A voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son whom I dearly love. I am very pleased with him. Listen to him!” **6** Hearing this, the disciples fell on their faces, filled with awe.

7 But Jesus came and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don’t be afraid.” **8** When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

9 As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Don’t tell anybody about the vision until the Human One is raised from the dead.”

Both this passage and the one from Luke remind those reading to hold these dear their heart until Easter has happened, until Christ is risen. Here is the request I have for you all, take up the things we have learned this season and as we journey through the wilderness in Lent, and then on Easter be prepared to let them go.

As I did my study for this last scripture I found that the lesson we can take from this scripture is that mountain jokes are a slippery slope. Why you ask...because they are hill areas.

Mountains are the place where people go in the bible to find change. We know this living in a Mountain state, we have been to the mountain top and seen how it changes perspective. In the Bible we hear the stories like when Moses goes to the mountain to receive God’s laws for the people of Israel. And if you ask Abraham, he will tell you that, “If you want a spiritual shift climb a mountain.”

Today I want to invite us into the characters climbing the mountain with Jesus, and specifically Peter. Remember Peter's role in the story he climbs the mountain with Jesus, then has this amazing experience of seeing 3 of the great leaders of his faith surrounded by God's light, and then what does he do...he offers to build a shrine or a holy housing unit for each of them. The question this leaves me with is, "What did Peter bring up the mountain with him, that he thinks he has what he needs to build a house, not just one, but 3 houses to contain the holy?"

Imagine for a minute if you will that climb up the mountain again with Jesus and his three companions. It probably took a little longer than the one line of text takes to read. These three companions are following Jesus and now we know at least Peter must have something to think he can build 3 structures. We can guess Peter is carrying a pretty heavy pack full of his supplies. As the 3 companions follow Jesus, Peter starts to slow down on the hike. Jesus turns around and says, "You won't need those things, leave them behind." Peter is a bit annoyed, because he knows he is going need supplies to raise the tent when he gets to the top. The stuff is getting heavy though, so he asks his other two friends to help out.

Later on his friends and him are breathing heavy, and there is Jesus walking, as if on water, not having the burden of a pack behind him. Jesus says, "You are all so generous to bring those great structures, but we aren't staying overnight. Leave them behind and let's enjoy this journey to the mountain top together." The three look at each other, shake their heads no and continue up the mountain with sweat running down their faces.

A while later Jesus looks behind him and his friends are even farther behind and now they have started to bicker, Peter blames James and John for whining and James and John blame Peter for bringing the things in the first place. They start to argue about the very nature of

why they even need to get to the top, who deserves to get there, and who should stay back to guard the supplies they are carrying. Jesus says, “The mountain top is the goal, you can leave those burdens behind.”

As the party crested the top of the mountain there was an amazing view and sun appeared behind Jesus and two other figures appeared. Peter poked his friend and said, “See now I can use my gear to build a tent for each of them.” When suddenly a wind came up and scattered all of the supplies and knocked the three men to their knees. When the three looked up, Jesus was standing there saying, “Incredible isn’t it, those that haven’t seen this beautiful view and had their burdens removed, won’t understand until they see it themselves.”

Instead take this lesson into account:

A part of my role as a Pastor is to help give faithful witness in the public arena, to remind our world that God is still speaking. One day a few years ago I found myself at our state capitol doing this work. As I sat down an older gentleman next to me leaned over and said, “Are you a pastor?” I said, “Yes I am currently a pastor of a United Methodist Church.” To which he must have seen the sticker on my coat and said, “I think we are on opposite sides of this issue, but it is nice to meet you.” The room was divided; you could feel the tension on the air. Everyone had brought something with them, some of the burdens were deep wounds and others strong weapons. I looked over along the wall stood one uniformed police officer, and looking at his utility belt I thought, “If things get bumpy he brought what he needs with him.”

The testimony on the bill had begun, and because one of my colleagues was testifying and time was limited, I found I was in a place to pray. I prayed that people’s hearts might be strong, and their minds might be opened to God.

One young woman got up to testify in favor of the Bill. A veteran of our countries armed services, she described two scenarios from her life. One in which she was looking for a house to rent, and was told, “We don’t rent to your kind.” The second scenario she described was a time in which she held a job, at which she excelled, but because of missing protections under the law, she was fired.²

Other brave people shared their stories, and then the hatred came from the other side. Vile language to which some of our lawmakers stood up to, demanding decency. However, the ways in which you can call another person “less than whole” are words that can be twisted to look prettier than they are.

A person sitting next to the brave young woman who testified was obviously uncomfortable, and tears began to stream down their face. The person who seemed the least prepared and who did not seem to be armed with the equipment of compassion, the police officer with all of the gear on that belt, walked across the room. He picked up the box of Kleenex off the podium and handed it to the person with the tear soaked face.

When I saw this I was knocked to the knees of my heart. In that moment we reached the mountain top together, all of us journeying together in that room. It didn’t last long before we came back down, and even now as I describe it not everyone in the room even knows we made it to the mountaintop. However, for one moment we heard God’s voice in the compassionate act of one person.

It probably won’t matter what you take with you to the top of the

² http://billingsgazette.com/news/opinion/guest/guest-opinion-a-montana-story-i-do-not-rent-to/article_cbcee3ed-43ab-5a3b-bbd0-e5d5e501767b.html

mountain, it probably isn't what you need. Jesus keeps telling us he will help carry our burdens, but we keep dragging them along. We keep loading them onto our neighbors, and then we fight about how to get to the top with all of our junk.

Instead, I think when we get to the top we will realize the cross we bear, the things we hold onto can be let go, and make a bridge to help us cross the divide between us and each other and even the divide between us and God. (Lay cross across the mountain tops)

This week and I would invite you throughout Lent until Easter on April 21, to consider what your cross is, what you bear with you and be ready to let God take those things from you. If we let go on the mountain top our view will be spectacular and the bridges of God's love will be built.

We may even be knocked to our knees when we see God's amazing grace. Shalom and Amen