

Getting Behind Jesus

There are moments when we think we are helping, only to discover that we are actually standing in the way. That is Peter's story today, and if we are honest, it is often ours as well.

Just before this passage, Peter has recognised Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the living God. It is a moment of faith and courage. But almost straight away, while those words are still ringing in the air, Jesus begins speaking about suffering, death, and resurrection. Peter pulls him aside and says, "God forbid it, Lord. This must never happen to you."

And we can understand Peter. He loves Jesus. He wants to protect him. He wants the story to go another way. He wants victory without vulnerability, freedom without cost, and glory without a cross.

But Jesus turns and says, "Get behind me, Satan." Not because Peter is evil, but because Peter is tempting Jesus towards a path that looks sensible, safe, and successful, but is not the way of God.

That is the unsettling thing about temptation. It does not always arrive looking wicked. Sometimes it sounds reasonable. Sometimes it sounds caring. Sometimes it comes in a familiar voice and says, "Don't risk too much. Don't give too much. Don't go all the way to Jerusalem."

But Jesus comes to reveal another way: mercy stronger than revenge, truth stronger than denial, love stronger than hate, and resurrection stronger than death.

So Jesus says, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." And we need to be clear here: taking up the cross does not mean worshipping pain, staying in unsafe places, or accepting harm as if God sent it. The cross is what happens when love refuses to turn away. It is what happens when truth will not bow to comfort. It is what happens when we feel the rough edge of God's way in our hands, and still choose love over power, image, convenience, and self-protection. Taking up the cross is not about becoming smaller, or letting ourselves be walked over. It is about making room for God — and when we do that, we become so much more.

Before we can pick up the cross, we may need to put something down. We may need to put down the baggage of needing to be admired. Put down the need to be right. Put down the fantasy that faith will make life neat and tidy. Put down the heavy load of resentment, fear, and control — the things we have carried so long we almost forget their weight.

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Jesus says, "Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it." That sounds like a paradox, until we realise how much energy we spend trying to save ourselves. We protect our reputation, guard our comfort, avoid risk, and cling to control until our hands ache. But in doing so, we can lose honesty, compassion, courage, and joy.

Peter had to learn this. Discipleship does not mean pulling Jesus aside and advising him on a safer route. It means getting behind Jesus and letting him lead.

Perhaps this is where the Gospel meets us today: not simply to admire Jesus, not simply to believe the right things about Jesus, but to follow him. To follow him into uncomfortable truth, costly mercy, difficult forgiveness, and love that refuses the easy answers of fear, blame, and revenge, even when the road feels steep beneath our feet.

The good news is that Jesus does not say this to shame Peter, or to shame us. He says it because he loves us too much to leave us trapped. He loves us too much to let fear be our guide. He loves us too much to let comfort pretend to be salvation.

So may we hear this call again. Get behind Jesus. Let him lead. Put down what keeps your hands too full to receive grace and feel the release of that weight. Pick up the cross that is yours to carry — not as punishment, not as proof, but as the shape of love in motion.

And trust this: the road Jesus walks does not end at the cross. It moves through the cross. It moves through surrender, mercy, and costly faithfulness, and it opens into resurrection like first light over the horizon.

For beyond self-protection is freedom. Beyond fear is courage. Beyond death is life. And the one who calls us to follow is already on the road ahead of us, turning again and again to say: Come. Get behind me. Let us go together.

Amen.