

Sermon: Cross Eyed: Rebuke
Text: Mark 8:31 – 38
Date: March 8, 2009 AM
Place: Jesup First UMC

I've got a problem. I have hoof-n-mouth disease. I don't know why. I can have the purest of intentions, but sometimes I just can't seem to communicate with my lips the feelings that I have in my heart. Or sometimes I just up and say really dumb things. Like the night I was preaching on Noah and the Ark, but from the very beginning of my sermon, I said: "Moses and the Ark." I had Noah written on the paper; I had studied hard about Noah, but Moses came out instead.

How comforting it is for me to know that someone else shares that same problem! You know, Henry Ford was a great man, a man who changed the world. He changed how products are assembled; he changed how products are marketed; and he changed how we travel from place to place. But did you know that Henry Ford forgot to put a reverse gear in his first car? Did you know that he built his first car in a building but didn't make the door wide enough to get the car out when he was finished? What was he thinking?

Well, if it happened to Henry Ford, then I feel like I'm in pretty good company. Maybe we don't have to be perfect to experience God's grace after all.

In our text, Peter, the Rock, the one upon whose faith Jesus would build the church, made a similar mistake. It was that day when Jesus asked the disciples: "Who do people say I am?" And they said: "Well, some say you're John the Baptist, and some

say Elijah or one of the other prophets.” And Jesus said: “Who do you say I am?” And Peter said: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Now, Jesus blessed Peter for his spiritual insight, but immediately Jesus began talking about going to Jerusalem to suffer and die and Peter took Jesus aside and said, “Now, Jesus you shouldn’t say such things.” But Jesus rebuked Peter, saying: “Get behind me, Satan! For you are seeing things from a human point of view and not from God’s.”

Now, there’s a difference between Jesus and Peter in these verses that perfectly illustrates the great difference between us and the Lord. You see, Jesus had a problem: He was cross-eyed; He was fully focused on the cross. It didn’t matter what seemed right to others; it didn’t matter what others said; Jesus knew God’s will and He was determined to follow it all the way to the cross.

How unlike us! We like to take the easy path, the path of least resistance! We like to focus on ourselves, because after all, “I” am the center of the universe. We’ve got to have it all, experience it all, and do it all. To us, the way of the cross seems dumb. Why choose the cross when I can have a pillow? Why deny my wants and needs when I can have it all? But Jesus destroys that selfish attitude, doesn’t He? He said: “If you want to be my disciple, and then deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me.” In other words, if you want to be my disciple, you’ve got to be cross-eyed too. The cross has to be more than a pretty ornament hanging in your

sanctuary or on the altar table; the cross and the way of living that it represents must be the very focus of your life.

That's what this text teaches us. ***First, it reminds us that "I" am not the center of the universe.*** How unlike the message of the world. I can't help but think about the old Burger King Commercial with all the employees dancing around the restaurant, singing, "Have it your way! Have it your way! Have it your way at Burger King!"

Now, that attitude has become such a part of our culture that we bring it into the church with us. And we can begin thinking that church is meant to meet my needs and fulfill my greatest desires. And if it doesn't, then I have the right to whine and complain until it does. But the last time I checked; it's not about you; and it's not about me; it's about Jesus. And that's a cross-eyed view of life.

Mother Teresa learned of a family that was starving. So she gathered some food and took it to their home. But when she gave them the box of food; immediately the lady of the house took the food and divided it in half and started to leave. Mother Teresa asked: "But where are you going?" And the lady said: "My neighbors are hungry and I can't eat unless they eat too."

How cross-eyed is that? How like Jesus?

Second, it reminds us to be people of the bruised shoulder. Every year, on Good Friday, they gather in Jerusalem and they carry the cross down the Via Dolorosa to the church of the Holy Replica,

but doesn't "taking up your cross" mean more than that? Doesn't carrying the cross mean more than wearing a cross necklace or cross earrings?

You know, in medieval times, it was common for devout Christians to pray for stigmata, the marks of the crucifixion, to appear on their bodies, because this meant a person was deeply spiritual. But one night a monk was praying for the stigmata when he had a vision of Jesus with a mark on His shoulder, a bruise from carrying the cross. And suddenly the monk realized that this was the only mark that mattered.

"If you want to be my disciple, deny yourself; take up your cross and follow me." Taking up the cross of Christ means carrying the burdens of others. It means putting the needs of others before my needs; it means enduring hardships so that others might come to experience God's grace and love. It might just mean setting aside what you really want so that others might experience something they really want.

Everybody was broken hearted when Miss Betsy died. She had been a faithful member of the church and everybody really wondered what would happen to Mr. Fred. But then, a member of Fred's Sunday School class started going by his house every day just to check on him. They went out to eat together; they did little projects together. And on Sunday, they went to church together. And nobody had to worry about Mr. Fred anymore.

How cross-eyed is that? How like Jesus?

Third, it reminds us that the gospel changes lives. We know because it changed us.

The old rugged cross made all the difference in the world. Did you know that 12% of citizens of the United States are considered “highly spiritually committed”? These are people who do more than join the church; they’re involved. They just don’t come on Sunday; they work in the church. And here is what we know about them: 1) they are happier than their neighbors; 2) their families are stronger; 3) they get along better with people who are different from them; and 4) they are involved in their community. What a difference the cross makes!

There were once two brothers who had a little wild streak. And they got so wild that they started stealing the neighbor’s sheep. Well, one day they got caught. And the villagers decided that their punishment should be branding. The letters ST, “sheep thief” would be branded on their foreheads. Well, one of the brothers was so embarrassed that he left town forever. But the other brother was different. He was really sorry for what he had done and he turned his life around. When someone was sick, he was there to help. When someone needed help with a job, he was there to help. And people started to depend on him a lot.

Then, one day a stranger came to town and he saw the young man with ST branded on his forehead. And he couldn’t help but notice how nice and polite the man was. So he asked the owner of the café, “What does the letters ST stand for?” And the man thought for a moment and said: “You know, it’s been

so long I just can't remember, but I think it stands for saint."

That's the difference the gospel makes in a person's life. It turns sinners into saints.

How cross-eyed is that? How like Jesus?

One day the artist Rodin saw a huge, carved crucifix beside the road. And immediately, he fell in love with it. He just had to have it. So, he bought the cross and paid to have it carted to his house, but when it arrived, it was too big for the house. So, Rodin erected the cross, then tore down his house and rebuilt his house around the cross.

What a challenge for you and me! You see, in many ways, the cross and everything it stands for is just too big to handle, too big for our very small lives. And yet, the wise person discovers a way to erect the cross and to build the rest of life around it. Jesus said: "If you want to be my disciple, deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me."

To be a Christian is to be cross-eyed! So, "I'll cherish the old rugged cross, till my trophies at last I lay down. I will cling to the old rugged cross and exchange it someday for a crown."

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen!