

Christ Episcopal Church
2 Emerson Street
East Norwalk,
Connecticut 06855-1330

Second Sunday in Lent (B)
February 25, 2018

DRAFT

8 AM and 10 AM homilies
by the Rev. Joe Parrish
“Run to win”

The Holy Gospel according to

Mark 8:31-38

Then Jesus began to teach his disciples 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.”

Help us bear our cross, Lord, for its weight may seem to be great, but we know your burden is light and your yoke is easy. Amen.

The Rev. Robert Baggott writes, “Auguste Rodin was a wonderful French sculptor who one day found an enormous, carefully carved wooden crucifix beside a road. Rodin bought that cross he so admired and had it

carted to his home. But when it arrived he found that the cross was too big to fit inside his house. So what did he do? He knocked down the walls, raised the roof, and rebuilt his home around that cross.” [Best Sermons, Three, Harper and Row, 1990, Page 115.]

http://day1.org/6454-cross_purposes

Baggott continues, “Now isn't that a wonderful metaphor? What if the cross was central to our lives, to our homes, to our very being? What if we lived under its shadow every day? What if it stood so near that we could pick it up

whenever its power was needed? What if we were poised to hang every evil on it, every injustice on it, every hardship and pain on it, to let the cross do its work as it has for millions of people for thousands of years?

“Then, it would be more than an empty metaphor; it would still be doing its work. And what's more, we who are the agents that employed that cross, would be God's agents of transformation. We would be, metaphorically, the cutting edge,

pushing the envelope, doing the heavy lifting, the rainmakers.

The Rev. Dr. Robert T. Baggott, senior minister of Community Church of Vero Beach, Florida, continues, “One of my all-time favorite cartoons comes from the New Yorker Magazine. It shows two businessmen sitting in a bar, one clearly despondent. The unhappy one says to his companion: ‘I was on the cutting edge. I pushed the envelope. I did the heavy lifting. I was the rainmaker. Then suddenly it all crashed

when I ran out of metaphors.”” [The Complete Cartoons of the New Yorker, edited by Robert Mankoff, Black Dog and Leventhal Publishers, Inc., New York, New York.]

Pastor Rev. J. C. Austin wrote, “I have been told that at the height of the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, when Christians were literally suffering and dying for justice and redemption there, Archbishop Desmond Tutu used to gather his staff around him in the mornings for prayer. And often as he

was closing, he would ask, ‘If being Christian became a crime, would there be enough evidence to convict us?’

Now the first time I heard that story I was horrified: if there's not enough evidence to convict Desmond Tutu of being a Christian, God help us all! But now I think he was asking it to keep himself and his staff focused on who and whose they were, rather than just what they were doing. They were not simply leaders, leading an important social struggle for dignity and freedom; they were followers, following Jesus

Christ in insisting that God's reconciling love transcends anything that tries to resist it, which apartheid challenged in insisting that different races could not and should not live together. Without being followers, being leaders was not enough; people had to be able to see and hear them following Christ in their lives and ministry for that leadership to really make sense in the first place.”

http://day1.org/4048-following_jesus_is_for_losers

Jesus calls Peter, satan, in today's gospel. Can you imagine Jesus calling

us “satan”? Wow. Gulp. And undoubtedly “Peter's heart breaks in today's reading because he doesn't get the God he wants. It breaks again at the end of the story when he realizes that instead of getting the God he wants, he gets the God he needs.”

“James Richard Lahman tells the story of a young woman he met by the name of Ann. Ann was a bright and articulate physician, 30 something, from Australia. She had grown up in a working-class Catholic family -- not poor but they certainly did not consider

themselves rich, as her father had to work two jobs to put food on the table. Her parents were able to give her one year of college, but after that she was on her own to finance the rest of her education.

“Upon finishing medical school she could easily have made a decision to make a fairly decent living for herself. Instead, she joined the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny, a French order of about thirty thousand members. She was working in the West African country of Gambia. Every morning

when she went to the clinic she would discover 10 to 12 women who had given birth during the night. Since the clinic had only 8 beds, sometimes new mothers would have to rest together on one bed. In some instances, new mothers even had to rest on the floor, for there was no other place for them, even at two to a bed. Eight hours was the maximum limit for their clinic stay after delivery.

“Lahman continued his story: ‘That young physician told me that each day after leaving the maternity ward she

would treat two hundred children who had malaria. In that remote area, this was the only medical facility. Ann was the only physician. Her staff consisted of some native nurses. Her lab contained only a microscope. She had only one drug to treat all of the various stages of malaria.

“I asked her ‘Why?’” Lahman continued. “Why had she given up the prestige, the privilege, the money and the power of a ‘regular physician’ among ordinary people? Why had she

become a nun after she was already a physician?

“Sister Ann smiled and said: ‘After medical school, I began to look at all the sadness, pain and suffering in the world. Once I started contemplating all of the brokenness that needed healing, I knew that, if I was ever going to be adequate to do my share of the healing work, I would first of all need to be a whole person myself. I needed a strength from beyond myself. I also knew that I would need the support of a caring and loving community of faith.’”

http://day1.org/1202-was_peter_looking_for_a_bailout

Jesus said, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

British Olympic star, Eric Liddell, in 1924 in Paris at the Eighth Olympics won the Gold Medal for the 400 Meter race, setting a world record. Liddell was probably the fastest runner in the world at that time in the 100 Meter race. However, he was a very devout Presbyterian, son of Scottish

missionaries in China where he had been born, and the trial runs for the Olympic 100 Meter race were held on a Sunday. He considered one of the Ten Commandments that said, “Thou shall keep the Sabbath holy”, and decided that his participation in those Sunday trials would diminish his witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. After each race he won, he would gather his admiring fans around him after the event and preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to them. He had gotten their attention by his athletic prowess, but he wanted to

move the attention on to the real meaning of life in Christ, not on his prowess at running. After the Olympics and finishing Edinburg University, Eric Liddell went back to the city of his birth in China in 1925 and began ministering there as a missionary, following the footsteps of his missionary parents. In 1937 the Japanese began the “The Second Sino-Japanese War, the largest Asian war in the 20th century, [Bix, Herbert P. (1992), "The Showa Emperor's 'Monologue' and the Problem of War Responsibility", Journal of

Japanese Studies, 18 (2): 295–363, doi:10.2307/132824] It accounted for the majority of civilian and military casualties in the Pacific War, with between 10 and 25 million Chinese civilians and over 4 million Chinese and Japanese military personnel dying from war-related violence, famine, and other causes.”

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Sino-Japanese_War

Eric Liddell continued his missionary work in spite of the ongoing conflict in China, once traveling through the

Japanese front lines to get back to his ministry. In 1941, after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the British government advised British expatriates to leave the country. But Eric and his brother Rob stayed on and continued their missionary work. In 1943, Liddell was seized by the Japanese and put into the dreaded Japanese concentration camp at Weihsein, China. In 1945, in an exchange between British and Japanese prisoners, Eric was offered an opportunity to leave the concentration camp, but he deferred to a pregnant

woman and remained in the camp. He developed a brain tumor to which he succumbed on February 22, 1945, shortly before the camp's liberation.

[A Great Cloud of Witnesses, 2016]

Eric Liddell's life became an inspiration to many in that camp and beyond; a writer composed a story about his life which was developed into a screen play and then into a movie which won four Hollywood Oscars in 1982, including Best Picture and Best Original Score. It was called "Chariots of Fire." Perhaps you may have heard its theme

song which was specifically written for the running sequences practicing for the Olympics and put into the film at the last minute. I think is still inspiring today, and as one evangelist in the First Century reminds us, possibly mindful of the original Olympic Games in Athens, he wrote, “to Timothy: ‘I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith’” (2 Timothy 4:7)

St. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth saying, “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way

as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever” (1 Corinthians 9:24-25). Paul’s exhortation is that believers should be as focused and dedicated as those ancient runners in the games, and in the Olympic Games today, and Saint Paul encourages us in the Twenty-First Century to do likewise. Our motivation in serving Christ is much higher; we ‘run’ not for a

temporary crown, but for an eternal one.”

<https://www.gotquestions.org/finished-the-race.html>

Amen.

Description:

Christ calls us to a higher goal, not reaching an earthly Olympic tape but at our end in the heavenly country where he and his Heavenly Father reign, and who will reward us generously for serving in Christ's kingdom on earth.

Tags:

Olympic, Games, Eric, Liddell, China, Japan, Japanese, prison, prisoners, camp, movie, Chariots, Fire, Oscar, Best Picture, 1982, Best Original Score, Scotland, Edinburgh, University, missionaries, missionary, Pearl Harbor, British, expatriate, St. Paul, Timothy, Corinthians, Athens, martyr, Peter, Jesus, Christ, Gospel, preach, Desmond, Tutu, apartheid, Auguste Rodin, French, crucifix, cross, Christians, Presbyterian, Archbishop, 1945

St. Stephen's Episcopal ProCathedral

35 S. Franklin Street

Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania 18701

The Second Sunday in Lent (B)

March 1, 2015

A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish

DRAFT

“Who is the Jesus that we know?”

The Holy Gospel according to

Mark 8:31-38

Help us bear our cross, Lord, for its weight may seem to be great, but we know your burden is light and your yoke is easy. Amen.

Who is the Jesus that we know? Is he a backwoods carpenter who simply became famous? Is he an amazing healer who was greatly sought after? Is he a great story teller? Is he a divine person who was above it all? Is he a sacrificial lamb who forgives us our sins? Or was he a lowly teacher who was able to inspire many?

Why do we follow the Jesus we say we know?

In a few moments we all will again recite the Creed that “We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God”. But do we really live lives that affirm that? Do we really believe Jesus can do anything that God can do? Or are we just a bit skeptical that he could do what God could do for us? In other words, do we really believe

that God, and God's Son, can do anything, even the impossible, for us?

Even a kernel of faith can move mountains, Jesus said. Faith as insignificant as the tiniest seed can do anything. But do we believe Jesus can do these miracles in our time and in our place and in our lives?

I contend that we probably do not think Jesus can do many or any marvelous works and miracles in our time and in our place and in our lives. And as a result, our inability to think in terms that even begin to approach the

potential we have in our Lord keeps us muddling along, mired in doubt and self-deprecation, feeling we may never actually see the really profound ability of God to affect our lives and our world.

Peter was a prime example of how we ourselves often act—we say one thing, but we surely believe something entirely contrary. Peter did not want to believe Jesus would sacrifice his life. Why? Was it because Peter was afraid that anything that happened to Jesus could happen to him? If someone you admired and were close to told you that

they would soon be killed, wouldn't that put you off just a little bit? "Don't say that!" "You don't really mean that!" we would counter, implying they were a bit 'off', just like Peter who responded with absolute negative faith to Jesus' proclamation of his imminent death and resurrection in three days. Peter not only does not believe what Jesus is saying, but Peter even goes even further to admonish Jesus for saying such things. And that comment of Peter, a comment that we all probably would have affirmed, 'how can you as God say such

a thing?’ We all would be speaking as the devil would have us speak.

Is anyone really willing to give up their life for their faith, as Jesus was calling us to do?

What I am contending is that none of us act as though our Lord were really able to affect our world, our place, and our lives. We live lives that tell others outside of our faith that we are no different from them, that we share many of the same prejudices, misgivings, and sins as the next person. And to prove that, other than coming to church, how

differently do we live than anyone else?
Do our lives show our faith to others,
other than maybe a fish or an Episcopal
shield on our car bumper sticker or our
door?

I have lived for forty years in an
apartment building where most of the
Jewish people put a mezuzah on their
door frame, a tiny representation of the
tablets with the Ten Commandments
symbolizing their belief in the teachings
of Moses. But I have yet to see anyone
there who puts a cross on their door
frame or anywhere else. If we are

taking up our cross, we are doing it so carefully and quietly that no one, maybe including ourselves, can tell it. We don't really stand up for the downtrodden.

We don't really share with the poor.

We don't really put ourselves out much if at all to show anyone how a Christian differs from just the rest of the world.

The cross we bear is oftentimes basically non-existent.

So how can we change into living, breathing Christ-centered people? How can our faith come alive? And how can we help others find the truth for their

lives by having faith in Jesus? Don't we find that we ourselves are the same impediment to faith that Peter was, Peter who was so soundly rebuked by his Lord for his lack of faith? Aren't we all in Peter's boat of doubt? We just like Peter, setting our minds on human things rather than divine things.

We all go about our lives in denial of our lack of faith rather denying ourselves? We affirm ourselves, and for sure we don't want to deny ourselves.

And we stand close to the margins of even being ashamed of our faith in

Jesus' words and commandments. Do we really love God with all our heart, mind, and spirit, or do we prefer to avoid examining our innermost thoughts about God? We too often may see our neighbor as more of an object to be manipulated, avoided, or ignored rather than loved.

The very fact that of all the things Jesus did and said, this particular saying about Peter being strongly rebuked by Jesus and Jesus' direction to his followers to deny themselves and follow him, was a profound report that endured

in more than one gospel, which indicates the importance the gospel writers felt Jesus was putting on the depth of our discipleship. That we too are shallow believers seems to be the point of it all, not so much to cast aspersions specifically on Peter, but to show each of us how passionately Jesus needs us to follow him without fail, and how important each of us are in carrying out Jesus' mission of bringing the Good News to those who might try to shame us for our faith.

The turning point in my life before seminary was when I happened to wear a non-descript button on my lapel once which said, “I found it.” “I found it.” It was an effort of our midtown Manhattan Episcopal church to bring others to ask about what we had found. We were even trained to do evangelism in the Grand Central train station, if you can believe that! Would you dare to ask someone in a train station if you could talk to them about Jesus? Would not most of us be ashamed to do such a thing? But how would you go about

doing such a scary thing? Or would we feel too fearful of the shallowness of our own faith?

I do a Bible study weekly with a varied group of people in an immigration detention center where anyone can come, and they do come. This past Thursday two Hindus came and listened to a presentation of “What about the church?” One was from Sri Lanka and the other was from Bangladesh. It is one of fifteen standard topics in the Alpha course which is probably the number one Bible study in

the world, and it is an Anglican/Episcopal Bible study. How should we present our faith to someone who has never really heard about Jesus Christ? First, it seems that it takes knowing at least something about ‘where the other person is coming from’. What do Hindu’s believe? What commonalities and differences are there between Christianity and Hinduism, or Muhammadism, or Judaism, et cetera? Have we educated ourselves enough in knowing about the other world religions even to be able to begin a conversation,

or are we working from a stereotype with little factual background? This topic, “What about the church and other faiths?” is now a standard course in most Christian seminaries today.

Another attender there said he was an atheist. How should we approach telling about our faith to an atheist, or would we be too ashamed of witnessing what we believe?

In my own case, many years ago I was fired from a job by a non-practicing Jewish person who told me that it was good to be religious, but not too

religious. But his life was likely not one his employees could mirror. Our Christian faith can be threatening to others who say they profess something else. True faith divides us quickly from those without it.

Are we avoiders of faith dialogues with others? Or have we tried to have a faith conversation with others? What does it take to do such a thing? One thing that seems necessary is at least to acquaint ourselves with some of the sacred writings and teachings of other faiths. Yet the balance to that is that we

cannot approach with any attitude of superiority others who have either a different faith or no faith. We are all God's people and the sheep of God's hand, believers and non-believers. But speaking with a confidence in the faith we do have is important. This is what we do in a confirmation class, or a new comers class, so let me know if either of those interest you here. How well could we present our own faith to others without having any shame in what we believe and how we act? People will watch us to see if we do love others, or

if we are superficially concerned about them. And our church attendance speaks volumes about how we prioritize our lives. Where do we put our interest on a Sunday morning? Is it invested with a believing congregation, or do we focus elsewhere, coming and going without recognizing how and where others see us on a Sunday morning. Our Sunday church attendance speaks volumes about our faith. How good is our Christian witness to others? And do we follow through during the week every day?

Let us take this season of Lent to reflect on how we are sharing our faith with others. Let us turn from any denial of the importance of their lives and their eternal destiny to our Lord and our God. And let us remember that our own life may be the only Bible they ever read.

Amen.