

This week have you tried like me
to figure out in Charlie Kirk's death how so
many of us can think and feel so differently?
And maybe you asked the question...
so how do we speak and share through
all our differences and division?
Is this who we are?
Who am I called to be in Christ?

**Well at the foot of the cross
is the only place I know to go.**

And today's scripture calls us
to take up our cross and follow.
We have been called to be a
different kind of people in this world.
We have been called to live
a life committed to following Jesus.
We have been called to become radical
in the way of compassion and love.
So let me ask you a couple of questions this morning.
What does it really mean to be committed to Jesus?
Do you know the promise of the cross beyond what the world promises?

Matthew 16 is the litmus test to decide
if we are a follower or a fan of Jesus.
Jesus in this passage show us that commitment and
his promise go hand in hand if we are going to take up his cross.

First Jesus begins in verse 21 by demonstrating his commitment. ²¹ **From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed...**

Jesus sets the example for us to follow in our commitment.
Jesus was committed to go where He was not wanted
to suffer for a people who rejected Him
to die for a lost world
Jesus demonstrated his commitment
and the promise of the cross.

Everything was going great.

Peter had finally figured it all out.

In Matthew from last week,

Peter has identified Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”

Could life get any better?

The Messiah, Savior of the Jews,

had come to liberate His people and Peter was

a high-ranking official in the new administration to be.

He was already picking out his corner office with the great view.

Then Jesus seems to take on a strange tone.

Those that He had come to rule would

cause Him to suffer and be killed.

This sounds so strange and as we continue

to read we learn that for this King,

a Cross will be His destination.

Do you think they even heard the part,

“and on the third day be raised to life”?

Probably not because all of a sudden,

Houston we have a problem.

The problem of Peter demonstrating his lack of commitment.

And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.”

The phrase “took him aside” implies that Peter

literally grabbed Jesus and pulled him away

from the others to talk with Him and rebukes Jesus.

In fact, Peter puts this in such strong terms

that he says that heaven would not allow it.

We pass judgment on Peter rather quickly

when we are guilty of the same kinds of things.

Don’t we try to live our lives by our plans and not God’s plan?

Speak out through our own beliefs,

ideology and personal political preferences?

Peter is a good example of the kind of followers we can be.

I would like to suggest that we have three choices in our level of commitment –

so far as the will of God in our lives is concerned.

I believe that Peter made each of these

choices at different stages of his Christian life.

The first choice that Peter and we have is to **carry our cross some of the time.**

Peter put the Christ in his place after his death talk.

At this point in his life,

Peter wanted a comfortable Christianity to follow.

He loved Jesus and wanted only the good things associated with Christianity – for example he liked the miracles Jesus performed, Jesus' beautiful teachings and simply being around Jesus as his fan.

These all fitted Peter's theology - but the Cross didn't.

We can have two spheres of life.

A Christian life and a secular life.

What I have seen this week is how that has been lived out by our friends, colleagues and church folks on both sides of this tragedy. You can see it every time someone said I think or added a but ...

Charlie Kirk was a human being.

A husband. A father. A son. A child of God.

He was assassinated in front of his family.

His life did not deserve to end in brutal violence.

No one's does period.

If that basic truth feels hard to accept...

Lord have mercy on us.

I gently ask you to sit with why.

Jesus had compassion for his followers when they failed him and he also had compassion for his enemies when they crucified him.

And the ugly truth for them and us is that they weren't that far apart in how they treated each other.

The second choice that Peter and we have is to **carry our cross most of the time.**

Fast forward a few days later.

Matthew records a little scene between Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin and his trial before Pilate.

You might remember it.

Peter has just denied knowing Christ three times.

Then Peter remembered the words Jesus had spoken;
'Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times'.

Peter wanted to follow Jesus totally,
but when it came to the crunch he literally chickened out.

I am sure we would have chickened out too.

The spirit was willing but the flesh was weak.

There are areas in all our lives,
which we have not completely given over.

And it is a sign in our Christian life,
that we find the Holy Spirit coming back to
these areas time and time again until we surrender them.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to you
about how you live and speak to the world?

Have you even asked first?

Because just a scroll from my FB feed
from people I know who are Christians in my life
shows there isn't much listening to anything
other than our personal positions going on.
We find ourselves wanting,
like Peter to be totally committed,
yet holding back and stuck in ourselves.
Where is the compassion even for those we see as our enemies?

The third choice that Peter and we have is to **carry our cross all of the time.**

Before the Crucifixion, we read of Peter
denying Christ before a servant girl of the High Priest.
After the Resurrection and following the Baptism
in the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, we see a totally different Peter.

He was bold to preach the risen Lord,
even before the High Priest and the Sanhedrin.

But at this moment Peter is not there yet.

Where do you find yourself as you take up Jesus' cross, some, most, all?

So Jesus tells Peter the promise
of the cross is that it cannot be denied.

The real issue as Jesus addressed it was that Peter was seeing things through the eyes of humankind and not through the eyes of God.

Our way is the way of least resistance.

Our way is the way of least pain.

Our way is what comes naturally.

Notice how strong Jesus' response is to Peter.

But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan!"

This is reminiscent of the 40 days of fasting

in the wilderness where Satan came

to tempt Jesus to abandon God.

In the same way, Peter was asking Jesus to not go God's way.

"You are a stumbling block to me..."

then remember verse 18 from last week,

"And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."

First, Jesus calls Peter a Rock and upon that Rock He will build His church.

Now He calls Peter a Rock, one that causes Him to stumble.

Interestingly enough, Peter remains a Rock,

but the good Rock has become a troublesome Rock.

The bottom line here is that Peter could not see God's agenda at work; he could only see his.

How many of us are just as guilty as Peter.

Yes, we know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and yes, we will follow Him, but only if he is going our way and saying what we want him to say.

To this Jesus says to us, "Get behind me fan!"

Then Jesus gives us a command for radical commitment.

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

There is no such thing as low-cost grace.

There is no such thing as low-cost Christianity.

Jesus is calling you to an all or nothing deal;
He wants all of your life and how you and I live our lives.

Nothing tests how we live our faith out
than differences that deeply divide us.
There is a massive difference between
being involved and being committed.
Being involved means that you can say and do
what you want and when you feel like doing it.
Commitment means that you are at the call of Jesus
24 hours a day, seven days a week and 365 days a year.
Commitment is what Jesus is looking for
in all of our lives and He wants us to have
the desire to serve Him not just on Sunday morning
but each and every day that we draw breath.

Commitment to the cross means
that we put our complete trust in Christ.
If we are committed to the Kingdom of Christ,
what are we doing to build up the Kingdom?
What are we doing to show the love that Christ has shown to us?
The power of Christ rests within the church
and it is that power that brings
light to the darkness, purpose to the pointless and hope to the hopeless.

After seeing many posts,
I was left trying to discern how some could see
Charlie as someone who did great harm
and others could see him as having a strong heart for Christ.
I don't think that we can deny either one
depending on what he did and said at different moments in time.
And there are those who paint him as a Martyr
who brought thousands and thousands of young people
and people of all ages to know and love Christ. I see you.

And those who see him as Malevolent
with words of hatred, harm, and division against people
who deserved to be seen and loved. I see you too.

Both are in this room and our lives.
We divide along Saint or Satan.
We hurt each other and wonder how
the other side can be so blind.
Some folks didn't hold back
and fired off in their hurt and were fired.

Truly that wasn't the moment to use
to name the harm and forget real lives are involved here.
Not political positions or even when we feel deep personal pain.
And even if we need to name harm it doesn't require
any of us on any side to abandon this simple belief:
that Charlie was a human being and a child of God
who deserved to live and not die.
In fact, it's precisely in moments like this
that we all must choose to reaffirm humanity,
if we're serious about our own values
and our following the beliefs of Jesus.

We either believe that every person
is made in the image of God, or we don't.
And, guess what? I do.
I don't pray for Charlie and his family because
I believe anything or everything I am hearing on either side.
Folks I pray because he was murdered.
Because his wife lost a husband and his kids lost a dad.
I intentionally choose not to drink
the poison that's being served up right now.
That same poison that dehumanizes him,
will also dehumanize you, and me.
It makes us cardboard cutouts without compassion.

His life did not deserve to end in violence.
And the kids who died at Annunciation in Minneapolis
and the Colorado school a couple of hours later
didn't, even the shooters.
And the democratic politicians in Minnesota didn't deserve it either.
If we're not on the same page there... I simply don't know what else to say.

Political violence begins when we stop
seeing people we disagree with as human.
When we let contempt replace compassion.
When we demonize each other.
When that happens, we don't just lose our political compass.
We risk losing our souls.
And my friends Jesus knew that.

25 For whoever wants to save their life[a] will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. 26 What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?

Jesus himself was not willing to sacrifice who he was to win.
He had nonviolent respectful debates
and differences of opinions with others all the time.
He hoped it would lead to greater understanding and cooperation.
We can't degenerate into a society that treats
differing opinions as personal attacks,
erasing the humanity of some and abandoning the gospel of Jesus Christ.
**We must recommit ourselves to reflecting
what Christ taught us through acts of forgiveness, healing and new life.**

That is who we are.
That is who I am in Christ.
And I hope that is who you will be too.