

Sunday Sermon August 30, 2026

Once upon a time, there was a beautiful, tropical island – that was devastated by a hurricane.

A few days after the storm, the island community was gathered in the ballroom of a local hotel with city officials, utility representatives, state leaders, FEMA. The officials gave their reports on the situation, and then they opened it up for questions.

Before even being called on, an anxious man in the front row shouted: “When’s my power going to be restored?” After him, another asked: “when’s my water coming back on?” A third inquired: “when is the huge pile of debris in my front yard going to be picked up?”

On and on it went – difficult and frustrating for the officials, since there was so much to do, so many needs, and so few answers.

So the city manager was getting ready to wrap up the question period, when he noticed a woman standing way in the back. She had patiently had her hand up the whole time, and he thought, “alright, one last question.”

“Yes, ma’am” – and she asked: “What can I do to help?”

What can I do to help? That’s the move. It can be a hard move to make, but it’s the move. The movement beyond “it’s all about me.”

So many of the messages we receive, messages deeply imbedded in us, say: “Take care of #1.” As long as you’re doing okay, that’s all that matters. The world revolves around you.

Jesus is pushing us beyond this self-centeredness. He guides us into community, into a place where the well-being of our neighbor is as important as our own.

Peter is the central figure in our Gospel passage tonight/today. Remember how Peter got it right last weekend? Jesus asked: who do you say that I am? And Peter nailed it: You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Peter

knocked it out of the park, and Jesus went on to praise him: Blessed are you, Peter, you are rock, and on this rock I will build my church.

So Peter might have been a little puffed up, “look at me” I’m the rock– Jesus gave me the keys.

And then, this week, Jesus informs the disciples that He will suffer, die and rise again – and Peter says, “whoa, hang on, Jesus, we want to be first Lieutenants in your army, we want you to smash our enemies, we’re not up for this stuff about the cross.” And Jesus says “get behind me Satan.” It’s not about what you get, but about what you give away.

“If any want to become my followers, Jesus says (so that includes us) If any want to become my followers let them deny themselves.” Deny themselves.

That’s the first movement, and it can be the most difficult. Acknowledging that we are not the center of the universe. God is. And so we make sacrifices in serving others, for service and sacrifice are what discipleship is all about. Going from “when am I going to get what I want?” to “what can I do to help?”

Moses is called to service and sacrifice in today’s first reading. He had a good life in Midian, he was minding his own business, keeping the flock. But God called him to return to Egypt to rescue God’s people from slavery. It would be a risk – Moses had fled Egypt after killing an Egyptian who was abusing an Israelite – He was called upon to deny himself, to risk his safety in serving God and God’s people.

I regularly encounter people placing other’s needs ahead of their own, ‘giving their life away’ as Jesus says, in love, in service of another.

There’s a man who sits on a bench outside of a local care facility, reading to his wife who’s sitting in a wheelchair. She’s suffered a stroke. His kindness and gentleness with her are inspiring, but it’s probably not how he imagined living his retirement years. I’m pretty certain there’s some self- denial.

I see this regularly – people caring for a spouse, partner, child, grandchild, friend. Denying themselves, giving their life away for the sake of another. It's admirable to do for a spouse or friend, but our Christian calling compels us to go beyond- to extend our service and sacrifice even to those we do not know – as we take seriously St. Paul's directive in the Epistle to extend hospitality to strangers.

And so as we set our mind on divine things, on the things of God, we imagine and work for a world where the mother in Immokalee who boards the bus each day to pick tomatoes in the scorching heat doesn't have to fear being arrested and deported, leaving her children behind.

Standing with her puts you at odds with the ways of the world, at the present moment. It might even put you at odds with family members or friends, but that's a small cross to bear compared to her incredible sacrifice each and every day.

Peter got it right and Peter got it wrong. He went wrong when he placed himself in the center, believing that following Jesus was about what he was going to get – rather than what Jesus was calling him to give away.

And the same is true for us – the formula is the same: We gain our life by giving it away. Loving and serving others – those closest to us, and even people we will never meet.

As we make our way in the world, following in the footsteps of Jesus, let us be mindful of needs of friends and strangers, and make the move from “it's all about me” to “what can I do to help?”

Amen