

## Mark 8:27-38

There are certain words and phrases that call for commitment. Now when someone bids you, "Good morning!" that person is not obligated to make certain your morning is good. No follow through is required with such words. But when a couple stands together before the altar and say the words, "I will," or "I do" to each other, commitment is understood. It is, in fact, required. These are not just words; these are words packed with meaning. One dare not speak them unless he, or she, is prepared to follow through with them.

Jesus in our text asks His disciples a simple question: "*Who do you say that I am?*" Peter answers for them all: "*You are the Christ.*" Well and good? Maybe, except that no period can be placed after these words. Rather, this answer calls for a colon. "*You are the Christ:* and this means that my life will reflect my answer." Did Peter follow through in this way? Hardly. Just minutes later he is receiving a severe rebuking from Jesus; from the one he just called the Christ.

Let's use our wedding analogy to figure this out. When a man and woman are united in marriage, he is now her husband, and she is now his wife. Don't be offended ladies, but could he not say of his bride, "you are the wife." And she could say, "you are the husband." I'm using the wording of Peter's answer: "*You are the Christ.*"

So what does it mean that this woman is now the wife to this man? Well, the pastor is supposed to point this out in the wedding ceremony. "For better or for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health." "Since you are the wife of me, I will be husband to you not just when the road we travel is wonderful, but also when it's difficult, even when it's bitter, and just plain awful." This is the commitment that is attached to the words, "you are the wife," and "you are the husband."

The same is true of Peter's words, "*You are the Christ.*" Christ Jesus is, in fact, the divine husband of His bride, the church. And so what Peter is really saying is, "Jesus, You are the husband, my divine husband." This, therefore, calls for commitment; the same commitment that a husband and wife have toward each other. "Jesus, You are the Christ, my husband, therefore I will be wife to You for better or for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, even unto death."

The path that a husband and wife travel is not always rosy. If it was, the commitment part would be easy. Does it really take commitment to handle the "for better...for richer...in health" parts of the marriage?

The same is true of being a Christian. If following Jesus was easy, there would be little or no commitment needed from us. But it's not easy. We must follow Jesus, He says, by denying ourselves and taking up our cross.

This involves suffering when necessary. It involves sacrifice from us. It means self-discipline; not claiming that my life is mine to live how I please, but my life belongs to Jesus - in the same way that a husband belongs to his wife, and a wife to her husband. But this is not to be seen as a curse, but a blessing.

Look at it through the eyes of our Lord. He does not claim that He belongs to Himself. But rather He belongs to you, His bride. He gave Himself up for you on Calvary. He denied Himself and took up His cross to lay down His life for you. He did this with joy our Gradual in Lent teaches us.

Jesus backed up His words to you with the strongest commitment possible. “You are the wife,” He says to you. Therefore He did what it took to redeem you from sin, death, and the power of hell.

What about you, and what about me? Every Sunday in our Creed we confess: “You are the Christ.” We remember our baptism with the words of the Invocation, and declare that we belong to Jesus as His bride. We come forward to the Communion table to share in the intimacy that belongs in our marriage to our divine husband, for here in bread and wine He gives Himself fully to His bride.

In all these we confess with Peter, “You are the Christ.” But do we follow through with what these words mean? Are we willing to deny ourself and take up our cross and follow Him? Or do we rather act at times as if Jesus was our ex-husband?

This was Simon Peter. He said, “You are the Christ,” but then he said “no” to suffering, sacrifice, and the cross. He rebuked Jesus for teaching His disciples that He would have to suffer and be killed. Peter did not want Jesus to walk that bitter road, and he did not want to follow Him on that awful road.

But if Jesus is the Christ, the husband of His church, He must suffer and die for His bride. For we are sinners deserving of eternal punishment. As the Christ, He takes our guilt, our sin, our punishment. This is the road He walked for us, and if we follow Him as a wife follows her husband, we will not suffer as He did, but we will endure suffering nonetheless. We will not be punished by God as He was, but we will be punished by the sinful world for following Christ. This is what it means to carry our cross.

But there is something we should know about suffering. A relationship cannot endure without it. Sufferings in a marriage are what bring a husband and wife together into a stronger union. An easy path will ruin a marriage. A couple must endure the “worse...the poorer...and the in sickness” parts to stay together.

And so with Jesus. If we don’t suffer with Him as Christians, we will fall away from Him. That cross He tells us to take up and carry is not to make our life difficult as a curse; it’s to keep us united to Him in our journey through life.

Jesus is always the Christ. This means that He is always your husband, and you are always His wife. It means that He will never stop loving you. It means that He forgives you of all your sins. And it means that He shares His home with you. This is His house and His table, but it’s also yours. And on the day when He comes to take you, His bride, to heaven, He will carry you across that threshold of the new home that He will share with you forever. Amen.