

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Epiphany 5

March 21, 2021

Sermon by Pastor Dan. Pautz

No backing out

—John 12:20-33

Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. “Sir,” they said, “we would like to see Jesus.” Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. “Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.” The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. Jesus said, “This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

“Hey, Dan, you can’t back out now,” were the words of a friend, Pastor Phil Koelpin who at that time was serving the congregation in Flagstaff. We were on top of a 35-foot cliff – right below us was Oak Creek. We were with some teens that lived in that area who had often climbed up the cliff and jumped off into the deep pool of Oak Creek below. And now I was supposed to jump.

- I had no problem climbing up the steep cliff area to the top where we stood
- I had no problem with the height
- I had no problem looking over the edge
- I had no problem with the depth of the water below – it was deep enough to jump in.

And now it was my turn to jump. “No backing out now!” I was told.

What I was facing that day was just a speck of dust compared to the massive mountain of challenge that Jesus faced the day the words of our sermon text were spoken. He could have backed out and nobody could have blamed him. But He did not back out. I’m glad he did not back out and so are you. We quickly travel back almost 2000 years ago and about 8000 miles away to the city of Jerusalem where Jesus was speaking to His disciples and a crowd which had gathered. It was but a day or two before Good Friday. The palm branches that people waved to greet Jesus a few days before on that First Palm Sunday were not yet dried out. Ahead of Jesus were sufferings and disgrace, violent hatred and lies, bloody agony and cruel crucifixion.

Now as I stood on that cliff deciding whether I should jump or back out, I obviously did not know whether I might hurt myself a bit when I hit the water. But Jesus knew what was ahead of Him. He was fully aware of the terrible suffering. And He did not back out.

- Jesus knew from the Bible that He would go through agony and even be forsaken by His Father. The Old Testament Scriptures is full of prophecies that the Messiah would suffer and die. For example, the great 53rd chapter of Isaiah had said that the Messiah would be stricken, smitten, and afflicted, wounded, bruised, and afflicted.
- Jesus gave a statement about his mission on earth saying that He ‘came not to be served but to give His life as a ransom for many.’ (Matthew 20:28)
- Jesus taught his disciples that He would suffer and die. Here is an instance of it. “He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this.” (Mark 8:31-32)
- Yes, He knew, and He knew it would not be easy. He said, “Now my heart is troubled.” In the Garden of Gethsemane were His words, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow, even to the point of death.” Do not think that what Jesus endured that Good Friday was only a tad difficult but not terrible. It was horrible and horrendous – nobody before and nobody since has had to endure such agonies. But he did not back out.

I did not jump off the cliff. I backed out especially since two of the several adults with me jumped first and were hurt. One damaged her sternum quite severely. There was no backing out by Jesus as He faced the hour of disgrace and crucifixion. He said, “Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!” And you know the reason he did not back out but faced crucifixion. It was for you and me.

Jesus used an interesting illustration from agriculture about a wheat seed that is planted. "I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." In the United States there are 50 million acres planted in wheat. It takes about 1½ - 2 bushels of wheat seed to plant one acre. That's a lot of wheat. When a wheat seed sprouts that wheat seed dies. But the wheat seeds that are planted can produce thousands of new seeds and about 60 bushels per acre. That was the point of Jesus. He would die and, so to speak, would be put in the ground. But by his death many people would have life, eternal life. That's why He did not back out. Thank Him again and again.

The great Lenten Hymn puts it well – "A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth." It is Hymn #100 in Christian Worship.

***"Go forth, My Son," the Father saith,
"And free men from the fear of death,
From guilt and condemnation.
The wrath and stripes are hard to bear,
But by Thy Passion men shall share
The fruit of Thy salvation."***

Yea, Father, yea, most willingly

I'll bear what Thou commandest;

How dare we think that the Lord does not love us! And shame on us if we think that our sins are not so bad. Look at the price that had to be paid.

***Ye who think of sin but lightly, Nor suppose the evil great,
Here may view its nature rightly, Here its guilt may estimate.
Mark the Sacrifice appointed!
See Who bears the awful load!
'Tis the Word, the Lord's Anointed,
Son of Man, and Son of God.***

It is not a coincidence that as Jesus made it clear that He would not back off from suffering and dying for our salvation, he also tells us that we are not to back out from serving Him. Jesus saved us not only so that when we die we go to heaven but also so that as long as we live on this earth we serve Him. Saved To Serve! Don't back off from serving him. Serving Him is not easy. Jesus said, "The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me." Understand that when Jesus warns us against loving our lives, He is telling us not to put our earthly life first. He is warning us against self-centeredness. It may be puzzling why Jesus said we should hate life in this world but He may be referring to sin and everything that is tainted by sin. Possibly, He might be using what is called an hyperbole which is using an exaggeration to emphasize a truth. Hyperboles are used often by us. For example, we have heard it said, "If I have told you once, I have told you a million times." Another example is "I am so hungry I could eat a horse." Certainly, it is clear that when Jesus tells us to hate life in this world, He is telling us not to fall in love with this world.

Don't back out of serving Jesus. Sometimes people serve only if it is convenient or easy; if it is not too demanding or costly. I especially want to address our younger people. You sometimes might hear older people talking about the good old days and how in today's world there are many more creature comforts than what they had when they were younger. We didn't have televisions, computers and microwaves and cell phones and I-pads; in fact, there are some who in their childhood days lived without electricity or indoor plumbing. We might talk about how tough we had it but I along with many older people think that in many ways our younger generations has it much tougher. Precious young people, I think you face a greater challenge of remaining faithful to Jesus and not backing out of serving Him than what we faced.

Let me explain.

- The devil was just as active then as he is now. The roaring lion was just as intent upon making Christians back out of serving Jesus and going to hell as he is now. He was not tired then; he is not tired now. Nothing there has changed.
- The sinful nature we are born with was the same a generation or two or three ago as it is now. Sinful natures don't come in different sizes such as small, medium, large. There is only one size. It will plague you until you die. Nothing here has changed.
- But I believe that the big difference between what young people faced 50-60 years ago and what young people face today is the sinful influence of the world. Far be it to think that everything in the world years ago was almost perfect for it was not. But I believe we were a bit more sheltered. I am convinced that the world of our USA is much more evil and more immoral than what it had been. I believe that statistics can prove that. There are many more who are unfaithful to their marriage vows, many more who live together without being married, many more who expect sexual relations if not on

the first date soon thereafter. There are many who do not have the respect for the Bible that people had years ago; a greater percentage of people who do not go to church or hear God's Word in their homes. There are many more who say as if they were quoting Jesus Himself "I don't have to go to church or hear God's Word to be a Christian." Young people, if you are typical of most, it is likely that many of your fellow workers and associates, fellow students and teachers are not following Christ. Some of them might be friends. There likely are pressures and influences upon you to back out of serving the Lord.

Don't back out. What's at stake if you back out? Now it did not make a whole lot of difference whether or not I backed out of jumping off the cliff into Oak Creek. But backing out of serving and following Jesus is fatal. Jesus makes it clear that those who back out lose life, eternal life. Now at this point we could lament about those who have backed out. But let's rejoice in all of our teens and young adults who have not backed out and are serving the Lord. It is so wonderful to see our young adults in church, some who now have babies in their arms. It is so wonderful to see them serving and praying, hearing God's Word and singing. It is very encouraging to our older Christians to see that you not backing out despite pressures that you may face. And let all of us older people pray for our young ones and let us as individuals and as a congregation do what we can to encourage them to be faithful.

Thank the Lord Jesus that He did not back out of His sufferings and death to redeem us. Thank Him also that He is leading you not to back out of serving Him.