



*The Second Sunday of Lent (B)*  
**February 25, 2018**  
*The Rev. Dr. Christian Brocato, Rector*

+May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Strength and Redeemer. Amen.

Early last Wednesday in my routine of early morning coffee and catching up on news as disturbing as it often is, a news alert announced the death of The Rev. Billy Graham. Some of us will remember seeing him as a powerful voice of the Gospel on TV. Some of us will remember that he was the spiritual advisor to President's Truman and Obama.

The Rev. Billy Graham carried the message of Jesus to throngs of people around the world. His theology was not necessarily consistent with my theology but I admired his strength and courage.

Billy Graham was an amazing and effective preacher, a herald of the Gospel as he perceived it, and one who sacrificed much for the sake of his beliefs. His preaching spoke to presidents, queens and ordinary folk on many continents. His preaching events called crusades reached some 215 million people apart from the TV broadcast audiences. "Graham conducted more than 400 crusades in 185 countries and territories on six continents. The first Billy Graham Crusade was held in September of 1947 in the Civic Auditorium here in Grand Rapids. It was attended by 6,000 people." ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billy\\_Graham](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billy_Graham))

Billy Graham's voice was distinctive. His passion for Jesus was at the very core of what he believed. He once said that he would prefer to be a simple pastor in a church than a missionary flying here and there. He believed that God called him to be a "warrior" for Christ. At the age of ninety-nine, Billy Graham, went home to God.

Moments ago, we sang the hymn, "Just as I am". That particular hymn accompanied the Billy Graham Crusades. He loved that hymn, as millions of Christians do today, and wrote a book with that same title. As a child, I learned the hymn from my mother's mother.

My grandmother used to chronicle the many 'camp meetings' she attended as a young person, outdoor gatherings under great tents. Those gathered from near and far heard passionate preaching and sang many hymns. "Just as I am" would have been one of hundreds of hymns sung at Southern Methodist Camp meetings in the South and across the Bible belt.

The text speaks loudly of a humble posture before God. I believe that posture is consistent with who we are called to be as Christians particularly during this Season of Lent. I also believe that there are theological challenges in the text: "Just as I am without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me, and that thou bidd'st me come to thee, O Lamb of God, I come, I come."

But wait! What if there isn't an opportunity for even one plea for God's mercy in Jesus? How could we continue as a faithful people much in need of hope? Prayer and seeking a closer relationship with God in Jesus would be challenging. Asking God for forgiveness and reconciliation with God and with one another would be challenging. Following Jesus would be challenging.

In today's Scripture passage, Jesus called his disciples to "follow", and follow, we believe they did. They dropped everything, left their work, their families and friends and followed Jesus.

Abraham and Sarah were called to ‘follow’ God. They were called to follow a path which seemed impossible if not even ridiculous, and follow, we believe they did.

St. Paul was called to ‘follow’ Jesus, and we believe he did. Paul wrote thirteen letters to new Christian communities such as that at Corinth, Thessalonica or Rome. Paul’s response in following Jesus was life-changing for all those to whom his letters were written. Those communities had different needs.

Today, Jesus calls us in to relationship and to follow him. His call is a continuous one. It began at our Baptism and has no end. His call and our response demand that we walk in his way and act as he acted in life.

At Baptism, we accept the call to relationship and are sealed as Christ’s own forever. We are baptized into Christ and into a covenantal relationship, a bond which cannot be broken.

Baptism is a covenant between God and us. There is nothing on earth which can take away or remove that covenantal relationship.

In today’s Gospel, a challenging sentence rings true especially during Lent; it is about the cross. During Lent, the crosses here at St. Mark’s are veiled in purple as a sign of the need for us to re-discover the beauty and power of the Cross. Today’s Scripture is challenging: “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

Lent calls us to take up our cross and the cross of Jesus and follow him. We are called to carry ‘his’ cross with him to Calvary. It is a journey of journeys.

During Holy Week, we will find ourselves with Jesus in the Garden of Olives and will journey with him along the path called the Via Dolorosa, the Way of Sorrow, and on to Calvary. We believe that his cross is our cross and that the crosses of our lives are his as well.

The crosses of our lives are those struggles in life which often demand much of us with very little left to spare. We attempt to bare those struggles in a fractured world in which we find ourselves, a world with deception, undermining people’s characters, lies and shady dealings which add to the complexity of life.

We live in a world where the very rich and entitled care less and less about the poor and the needy. To call ourselves Christians is to embrace what it truly means to follow Jesus and to be like him, to be people of justice, truth, mercy and peace.

As Christians, we are called to identify the crosses of our lives along with “those things we have done and those things which we have left undone” and to bring them to the Cross. Christ promises to carry the crosses of our lives with us. I believe that and pray that you do as well.

During Holy Week, we will offer The Stations of the Cross as prayerful reminders of the suffering and death of Jesus. On Good Friday, we will hear the words, “This is the wood of the Cross on which hung the Savior of the world. Come, let us worship!” On that day, we will walk with Jesus to his crucifixion. It is there he sacrificed his life that we might have life.

In many ways, Good Friday is the culmination of the Lenten journey. However, it doesn’t end there, does it? In and through the cross of Christ, light will burst forth upon the day we call “Easter”.

Today, we come as who we are at this moment in life. We come with our joys, our sorrows, our celebrations and our fears. We come to offer who we are to Jesus Christ, the One who gave his life for us and for our salvation and the one with whom we will rejoice on the day of resurrection. Amen.