

-One of the most frustrating elements for me of early elementary school was being in a line. Whether it be going on a field trip or just simply walking from the classroom to the school library, lines were always used to get us from point a to b, and I remember specifically my 1st grade teacher being very particular in how we should behave when in one. She developed some kind of point system which allowed you to get to the front when the class formed a line. The person with the most points, of course, got to help the teacher lead the way. It was always very difficult for me to get enough points to be in any contention for the “front of the line reward.” I was mostly a good kid in the classroom (which is where I earned points), but I would lose all of my points in the line because I would get distracted by something and hold the line up or skip a few places and break things in talking with my friends. “Eric!” my teacher would say, “where is your place? You are holding things up!”

-Perhaps some of us might get this image of a 1st grade teacher scolding a kid from Jesus’ actions in our Gospel story today: “Peter, get back in line!” Traditionally, this story has been interpreted with almost a militaristic type of meaning: as Christians we are called to “get in line” and “stay in line” behind Jesus. Jesus’ stark and forceful rebuke of Peter is then reinforced by his later language of “denying oneself and picking up their cross.” This language of “losing one’s life” at the end of our passage, it seems to me, makes Jesus in a way look more like a military commander giving an order than a teacher.

-We have not been able to shake that “militaristic line forming” background from this text even today. “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me,” words that even today are used to keep women in abusive relationships or tamp down any effort to demand equality. “This is your cross to bear”, the line goes...

-Let me be very clear: this is not what Jesus was saying and anyone who uses these verses to explain away or pass judgement on one who wants to escape domestic violence, sexual exploitation or abuse: shame on them.

-But what is Jesus trying to say here?

-I think what the gospel writer is doing is juxtaposing two statements of Jesus: the first one is Mark 1: 17 when Jesus says to Peter: “Follow me” (or literally in the Greek “come after me”). Here in chapter 8 verse 33 he uses the same word (opiso) when Jesus yells “get behind me Satan!” except it’s in the imperative (command) form here which is translated most accurately in the words we have here today: “get behind me.”

-“Get behind me” in a lot of ways is vastly different from “Come after me.” One an invitation and one a command. But in setting up this comparison, Mark is demonstrating Peter’s mistake as not so much “stepping out of some Christian code line”, but in simply trying to be a Savior. Mark goes to great strides to say that Peter took Jesus aside and “rebuked, chided, admonished, or lectured” him. Peter is trying to say: “No, I’m taking

over. You need to do it this way.” How many times have you tried to be the savior of something or someone? I know I fall into this mindset all the time. I’m the savior of this person who is sick or of this important project or even of this institution. As I am preparing to go on parental leave for a month, I have to be honest, I’ve really been struggling with this myself. Call it “savior-itis”. We think we are the ones to hold it up and to lecture everybody on what’s the best thing to do. We like to be number 1 don’t we? How do those things usually turn out when we have savior-itis?

-But here is the thing that I still question with this statement of Jesus: why did Jesus say “get behind me *Satan*” and not “get behind me *Peter*”? Where does Satan fall into this?

-Perhaps a way to explore this question is to look at it with the example of the “violence in schools” debate that has gripped our country especially this last week following the tragic shooting at a Florida high school. Now I don’t care if you are a member of the NRA or a hippie living out in the woods or whatever in between: 99.9% of us want schools to be safe from school shootings. The statistics show, however, that this is more and more not the case: the number of school shootings continues to rise. Our schools are growingly not as safe as they once were. And let’s be honest, the road to solutions: any kind of legislation, mental health reform, and intentional community building which are all needed to make our schools safe is long, hard, and complex. There is a lot of disagreement. There is a lot of anger and there is a lot of fear. So much so that we are now seeing statements and comments on the news and on social media that are like: “This is are new reality. Nothing really can be done.” Nothing can be done? -”Jesus, you really shouldn’t be talking that way. You know, against the whole Roman Empire and that whole Son of God business, it’s kinda too risky. Let’s just stay put for a little while. Nothing really can be done.”

-This weekend we have been hosting Pastor Tri Robinson from Boise, Idaho who has spent a lot of time thinking about, praying about, and preaching about Climate Change and creation care among evangelical churches. Because of this, he has become what you might say a unique and in some cases a divisive figure. A friend and colleague of mine at an evangelical church downtown who was helping out with Tri’s visit showed an email from one of his parishioners following the newspaper article on Tri yesterday. “Don’t even go or accept the stuff that this guy is saying,” the email stated. This guy must be a secret liberal with an agenda, he just needs to shut up.

-The tempter is powerful and prevalent. If Satan is not that little voice saying: “you can be a savior, you can do this on your own”, then I bet you instead that little voice is saying “let up, don’t do this, let up, there is nothing you can do.”

-As I have mentioned before, we are this Lenten season having a conversation on being a disciple. We’ll be hearing from several of our own church members’ reflections on how their discipleship (“coming after Jesus”) has changed and morphed in their lives. I encourage you to come on Wednesday evenings at 6:15pm for our Soup Suppers and

support them. In this conversation, I believe these words of Jesus have a particular role to play. "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it." Maybe being a disciple of Christ is more about leaning on one another in community than it is about getting from "point a to b in a perfect line." Maybe it is more about how we disciples can in community encourage each other to get Satan out of our heads: to break each other from being completely overwhelmed or remind each other that we are not the sole "super heroes to save the day." I don't think Jesus is generically outlining a suicide mission for everyone (that would be kinda creepy). But, I do believe he wants his disciples to understand that following him is about more than leftover bread and calmed storms. Being a disciple demands of us to live more deeply into the community and love of God. What are you following and losing your life for? What are we as a church stepping out of line and losing our lives for?

-May God bless us and give us courage to allow our Savior to lead, to not be tempted to be anything less than we were created to be, and to live as disciples into one another building up the sacred creation and community of God. Amen.