

Gull Lake Sunday

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[0 : 0 0] Holy God, you are here and you were here long before we ever were here.! God, you are God and you hold us dearly.

God, I pray this morning as we come to you that we know and we feel your presence and that we know you. God, as we sang, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be good and pleasing to you.

We praise in the holy name of Jesus. Amen. Okay, was my mic on before? Am I on now or did I just get quiet and now it's like, oh, he's praying, we've got to turn the mic up.

Oh, yes, I am. I am very contemplative. Speaking of contemplation, let's contemplate on the word of the Lord. So, I have it. I'm actually going to read scripture several times throughout this talk.

So, you'll have time to sit with it as we go. But the scripture here today is from Mark chapter 8 verses 34 to 38. We have it here as well. But if you like it in your Bible, that's great too.

[1 : 1 1] Mark chapter 8 verses 34 to 38. Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said, Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

For whoever wants to save their life will lose it. But whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world yet forfeit their soul?

Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.

Good. Okay. First off, just so you know, I don't know what it means for you to take up your cross and follow Jesus.

I just want to start with that. This is not a prescriptive sermon. I will not be telling you what to do. I'm not going to focus on what it means for you to deny yourself.

[2 : 1 9] Because I don't know you. I don't. So, I'm not going to tell you what to do. We all live out our faith and our calling differently. For example, I cannot do what Pastor Kent does.

I can't be a pastor. I can't. I just can't do it. I can't create a new sermon every week. It takes me a full month to write a sermon. I don't have the training, the skills, the calling.

I can't do that. You have no idea how nervous I am and how nervous I always get before I preach. Always. I'm an actor, so I fake it.

I fake that I'm calm. I fake that I'm calm. I fake that I'm sweaty. I think about it all yesterday. But here I am. Preaching is super stressful for me. In moments of stress or crisis, we tend to return to what we know.

For me, like I said, my first training was acting. So, I turned to that training to help me. The actor, Anthony Hopkins, reads his scripts around 200 times before showing up on set.

- [3 : 20] He just sits in the words and the world of the characters, reading it over and over and over, immersing himself in the text. This is what I always try and do with the Bible.
- I love to sit with it and read it over and over and over and just put myself into the words of the text. Because it's not just some coincidental collection of words written by, you know, an infinite number of monkeys on an infinite number of typewriters.
- This is the careful telling of the story of Jesus. These are words that were spoken, witnessed, then remembered, then told orally, then eventually written down to be preserved so that we could read them.
- These words reflect real events recorded by real people. And I love looking at the Gospels the most when I read the Bible because these authors, these storytellers, are painting a picture of what it was like to be with Jesus.
- And each one's slightly different. They're all accurate, but from a slightly different perspective. So, to prepare for a sermon, I just sit in the text. I read it over and over and over.
- [4 : 28] And I try and sit in the world that they were spoken in, these words. And I look up the words in the original language, and I follow the little rabbit trails of thoughts that come. And I love doing this. It's one of my favorite things to do.
- And the more and more I spend time in the living word that is the Bible, the more in awe of it I am. The more I love it. There's just, there's nothing better.
- There is nothing better than this. So, here's the text again. Like I said, I'm going to read it a few times. So, you can just sit in it as I've been doing over and over these last six months. I'm not going to put it up here because that's distracting for me.
- Just, you can close your eyes or you can follow along, but here's the text again. Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said, Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.
- For whoever wants to save their life will lose it. But whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world yet forfeit their soul?
- [5 : 28] Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.
- As a teenager, I was pretty intense. Like, I was focused. And it was the 90s, so being intense was like the thing to do. Especially for Christians, right? Like, think, I don't know if you remember, like, Jesus Freak, Audio Adrenaline, Newsboys saying about how they don't serve breakfast in hell.
- Like, that was the pop Christian culture and it was intense. It was an intense time. So I gravitated to this verse and verses like this because it was so hardcore. Take up your cross.
- Deny yourself. Lose your life. As a 90s teenager, this was my verse. But when I read it today, I'm a different person.
- I'm in my 40s. I have a wife. I have four kids. I have university to pay for for my kids. This verse reads very differently now. And frankly, I kind of want to avoid it.
- [6 : 37] But I'm not going to. I'm going to sit with it. I'm going to read it over and over and over again. I'm going to embrace it as if my life depends on it. Now, I wrote this sermon before I decided that I needed to take a break.
- I write one sermon a year and then I do it for that year. So I wrote this back in December and January. And as I go through my heart change, I can see that my life actually does depend on these verses.

It depends on the invitation that is here. It depends on what Jesus is inviting me into. But I'll get to that. There were three words that stood out to me when I sat with this text.

Three words that made me curious. Three that hadn't stood out to me before. And these are the three words. Wants. Gospel. Adulterous.

Those are the three words I noticed and I will focus on this morning. So first word, wants. I noticed the word wants. Whoever wants to be my disciple.

[7 : 42] Not everyone who is my disciple must or you must or anything like that. But whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

This is a choice. You do not have to do this. This is 100% voluntary. You get to choose. So why would you choose this? Why would you choose to deny yourself?

Take up a cross? Lose your life? As a 90s teen, that sounded awesome. Today, it sounds terrible. Why would you do that? Well, I don't know why you would do that.

I don't know your life. Like I said, I can only speak for myself. And I'm not going to try and convince you of anything because that's not how faith and relationships work. But I will tell you why I want this. Why I want to be a disciple of Jesus.

And simply, it's because I've met him. I've encountered God. I have sat with Jesus. I've seen God move in my life. I told you how I have seen God answer prayers countless times at camp.

[8 : 49] Two stories of my life. Both when I was a teenager, this intense 90s teen. And it's stories from camp. Because I'm really trying to lay it on thick that you should send your kids to camp, your grandkids to camp. Camp's amazing.

Send them. So my first time at camp, my very first week, was when I was a 15-year-old. Because even though I was intense, I was actually a pretty shy homebody. And I didn't want to go until I was 15.

So I finally go to camp. And I go to Gull Lake. We have chapel in the morning. And we're given some time to journal and to pray. And I grew up in the church. So I knew Jesus.

Like I knew Jesus. Because I was sitting there, a question came to my mind. Do I believe in God? And I really sat and I pondered that question.

Again, because I'm intense. I was like, okay, I've got to focus in on this. And after thinking about it, I thought, yes. I absolutely do believe that there is a God. God, an almighty creator who made me and the world around me.

[9 : 46] And then another question came into my mind. So what are you going to do about it? And I remember being confronted with two paths. I could either acknowledge that God existed and basically ignore him.

Or I could acknowledge that God existed and choose to know him. And to learn more. And to dive into relationship with him. And that's what I chose. Because that's the moment that I credit as the switch.

When my faith became my own. It wasn't just something that I did because my parents did. Or because that's how I was raised. It became my faith. And it became important to me.

Second story. So two years later. I'm now on summer staff at this point. And it's senior teens. It's high school. It's the culmination of the summer. And after an amazing night where I was with people as they came to Jesus.

I got to pray with kids as they came to Jesus. I'm so pumped. I'm so amped. And I find myself laying in a field. And we have this giant tire swing. Or this giant tractor tire.

[10 : 44] And it's buried in so it kind of sticks out. And I'm laying on it. And I'm staring up into this incredible starry night. Out in the country. And I felt this incredible feeling where I felt like I was laying in God's hands.

That he was just holding me. Cradling me. I had never felt that before. That intimacy. I had actually never felt that since.

Until this past couple of months. As I go through kind of my time of transition now. This intimate love where God is with me. As a 17 year old.

It was the first and only time I'd ever felt loved like that. I can't describe how special that feels to me. That God cares for me personally. That he knows me.

Myself. In this season of transition for me. I can see that my heart is being broken open. And it's an incredibly painful time for me. Frankly. But as it's happening.

[11 : 47] I'm experiencing God in a totally new way. And I can see how he's holding me through this. I can see in my journey. And this is kind of a new thought for me. There's something called an 18 inch journey.

We grow up knowing about God. And there's this 18 inch journey where we go from knowing God. To loving God. I feel like I'm on a new 18 inch journey.

Where I know God. And I love God. But now I'm experiencing this guttural trust of God. Like my deepest fears. My deepest longings.

That I don't even know how to describe or vocalize. They're like deep guttural works. I see that I'm actually finally turning that to God. And there's a different cradling that I'm being held in.

In this season. And as someone who likes to be in control. And has a bit of an ego. This has been an incredibly difficult 18 inch journey. As I go through. But I'm starting to see the light in it.

[12 : 48] And oh my goodness. It is. It's one of those things that. Once you've encountered it or experienced it. You can't go back. And that's where I feel like I am right now.

So that's why I want this. That's why I want to be Jesus disciple. Sometimes I seriously consider what my life would look like without Jesus. If I had taken the other path.

To ignore God. Because sometimes it's tempting. Right? The hedonistic life has temptations. That are tempting for a reason. They look good. Like really good.

But I sit. And I pause. And I think about what really matters to me. And what really matters is Jesus. That is what I really want. Truly deeply want.

So that's my choice. So that's my first word. Wants. Second word. Gospel. This word stood out to me. Because I was surprised that Jesus uses this word. Like it seems like a word that you use after the story has been written.

[13 : 46] Like it sums it all up. Not a word you would use in the middle of the telling. So gospel is a Greek word. It means good news. That's the translation. It's like a letter being delivered.

Or a message coming in that holds good news. So it's like this active good news. Whoever loses their life for me and the gospel will save it. Whoever loses their life for me and for the good news will save it.

That's the translation. So what is the good news? What does Jesus mean by that? Okay. I'm going to just rant here for a little bit. I know a sermon is basically just a monologue. But I'm going to like do a monologue within a monologue here right now.

Again, actor. So here's the deal. The good news is God's story. It begins in Genesis at the creation of the world. When God with full intention and care created everything.

In order with goodness and power. Our God didn't force creation. He called out let there be. And creation responded with gusto and vibrance.

[14 : 51] The good news is that God created us. Created me. Created you. Created humans. In his image to be his image bearers in the world. Not to be slaves. Not to be subjects as the Egyptians or the Babylonians or the Romans would have told them.

No. We are to be God's co-laborers in the work of the world. We've been given a holy responsibility to care for and to nurture creation. But then.

All hell breaks loose. And we did become subjects to sin. And slaves to brokenness and to powers that bring death. But that did not stop God. He has been working and caring and intervening all the way.

All the way. Until. Until. Jesus. Jesus who has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages. To do away with death by the sacrifice himself.

To make all things right again. That anyone and everyone who believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. Amen. Amen. Right. That's the good news. Right. There's the monologue within the monologue.

[15 : 52] That's the gospel. That's what we're here for. But. This hadn't happened yet. Right. At this point in the story where this verse is. When Jesus says gospel.

He's still alive. He hadn't died. He hadn't defeated death yet. That's why this word stood out. This word stood out to me. He says gospel. But we haven't experienced the gospel yet.

In fact. Right before this passage. Is the very first time. That Jesus mentions he's going to get killed. Like it's a couple sentences before. And his disciples couldn't handle it. They're like absolutely not.

That's why he goes into these verses. He's telling them. That this is the way. Star Wars reference. This is the way. For him.

And for us. This is the way. He's telling us. That it's actually good news. Jesus. Who I think did not have superpowers.

[16 : 53] During his time as a human. But who was in such close communion with God. The father. That he knew how it would go. Jesus is offering. That by being his disciple.

By receiving the sacrifice. That was about to come. We could have the same relationship with the father. We could have that closeness. We could take part in the life that was to come.

Just like Jesus. The fully redeemed. And fully renewed life. That's what we are trading our lives for. The gospel of Jesus.

The good news of Jesus. To receive it. To believe it. And then to tell it to others. That is what we get in return. The good news. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world.

Yet forfeit their soul. What is better than the gospel. What is better than Jesus. Well. Nothing. But.

[17 : 52] Sometimes we forget that. Sometimes we are deceived. And sometimes we deceive ourselves. So the third word that stood out to me. Is adulterous. Adulterous.

Adulterous. Is to be unfaithful. To put our love and trust in something else. If anyone is ashamed of me and my words. In this adulterous and sinful generation. The son of man will be ashamed of them.

When he comes in his father's glory. With the holy angels. Adulterous. Adulterous doesn't necessarily mean sex here. It could mean sex. But not necessarily. It means to choose something else.

Over God. That's the temptation. It's the original temptation. That's the Genesis 3 temptation. And it still works today.

In the garden. At the beginning. The serpent deceived. Eve and Adam. By sowing seeds of doubt. That doubt became distrust.

[18 : 49] And that became disobedience. They doubted that God was best. So they turned away. They turned to something else. They were unfaithful. In Ecclesiastes.

Solomon talks about meaninglessness. Everything is meaningless. Meaningless is translated from the Hebrew word. Haval. It means like breath. Or vapor.

Meaningless means. Something without substance. Without meaning. Obviously. Something empty. Something shallow. Like a vapor. That is there.

But then gone. It just vanishes into the air. It's the opposite of God. God is substance. Steadfast. Everlasting. Solid. And true. Vapor is nothing.

The adulterous and sinful generation. Choose to follow the vapor. The emptiness. The shadow. The shallow. I know that I've done that. It's tempting to go after the vapor.

[19 : 51] To chase the easy in the moment. It's part of what I'm going through right now. Is realizing. Oh. There have been things I've been chasing that are just vapor. I was deceived. But what do you want?

What do you really want? The vapor. Or the substance? Let's read the verse again. Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said.

Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it. But whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.

What good is it for someone to gain the whole world yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words and this adulterous and sinful generation.

The son of man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his father's glory with the holy angels. Okay. Last thought. I'm wrapping up here. There's a question that gets thrown around.

[20 : 55] That gets thrown around a lot in planning or visioning sessions. And I love planning. I love vision. I love strategic thinking. So I hear this question a lot. And the question is. What would you do if you knew you couldn't fail?

What would you do if you knew you couldn't fail? And it's meant to inspire creativity and thinking bigger. Like if you knew you couldn't fail, what career path would you take? Or what business strategy would you go after? I hate that question.

I don't think it's useful. Because you can fail. One of my big things is I'm terrified of failure. That's why I work so hard. It's a big problem for me, actually. So I know that I can fail. Like if I knew I wasn't going to fail, I would go be a baseball player.

And I was on a \$500 million contract. It would be awesome. Or I'd start the next Google. Something like that, right? But I'm not able to do that. And I would fail.

So that question is not actually super helpful for me. I like a different question instead. But it's going to seem like a worse question. All right? What would you do if you knew you would fail?

[21 : 57] What would you do if you knew you would fail? And this clarifies something for me. What is so important to me that even if I knew I would fail, I had to try anyways?

What is so important that the outcome must be pursued, the effort must be given no matter what? What is so important that it doesn't matter? What is so important that it's worth the possibility, even the probability of failing?

Because this is a tough teaching that Jesus gives. You know how I know it's tough? Because they all failed. Every single one of them.

All of them. Every single disciple failed this. They heard him say it, and they failed. They literally had the chance to not only take up their crosses, but they could have literally, and I use that word correctly, literally carried Jesus' cross.

Someone had to carry Jesus' cross to Gethsemane. But they all left. They all deserted Jesus. So a different guy did it. They all deserted him.

[23 : 18] They all failed. But they came back. They came back. They took up their cross. Again, some of them literally.

And they followed him. What is so important to you that even if you knew you would fail, you would do it anyways? What is so important to you that you would give up your life for that?

For me, it's my wife. That she would know that I love her. For me, it's my kids. That they would know that I love them. That they would know that Jesus loves them.

For me, it's Jesus. Even as I failed, I would try to love him with all of my heart, with all of my soul, with all of my mind, and with all of my strength.

I would try to follow him. I would throw myself against that wall over and over and over again. And here's the thing. You don't get to control the outcome.

[24 : 24] You don't know how this turns out. You are responsible for the effort. You are responsible for your choice. What is so important that you would do it, even if you knew you would fail?

Where do you choose to put your effort? We don't know what happens after we pick up the cross and follow Jesus. All we know is if we decide to do it.

There's a comedian. This is a weird reference. It's a comedian. His name is Dave Chappelle. And he has this amazing line that's stuck in my mind for the last year. He says, I'm like Evel Knievel.

I get paid for the attempt. We don't know the outcome. I don't know the outcome. I don't know the ending. But I know the start. And I trust Jesus. So today, I'm going for the attempt.

And that's my invitation to you this morning. What do you want? What is the most important thing to you? What is so important that you would deny yourself and take up your life to go after it?

[25 : 24] What is the good news to you? And what is the vapor? I invite you to follow Jesus. Actually, it's not me that invites you. I don't invite you.

Jesus invites you. And he invites me too. He invites us to give up our lives as we know them and follow him. Let me read the text one last time and then I'm done.

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said, whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

For whoever wants to save their life will lose it. But whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world yet forfeit their soul?

Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words and this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.

[26 : 29] I actually don't know what comes next. Do I pray? Do I invite people back up? Let me pray. Let me pray. Holy God, you are God and you are so good.

God, I praise you. I worship you. I thank you. I am so deeply in love with you. God, I pray that you meet myself and every one of us where we are right here today.

And that you just sit with us as we sit with you. And God, may you gently in your grace, but also with full power and authority, invite us and nudge us into deep relationship with you.

May we follow you with all that we are. And may we give our lives 100% fully into your care. We pray this in the holy name of Jesus, who was, who is, and who is to come.

Amen.