

Text: Mark 8:31-38 Lent 2  
Date: Sunday, March 12, 2006  
Location: Zion Lutheran Church- North Battleford  
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Grace and Peace be unto you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Mark Twain once said, "Many people are bothered by those passages in Scripture which they cannot understand; but as for me, I always noticed that the passages in Scripture which trouble me the most are the ones which I do understand."

If we listened with intent ears this morning during our gospel reading we too might be a bit troubled. Simply put, in today's reading Christ is calling us to lose our life in order to save it. (Mk 8:35) This isn't a kind and gentle message that leaves us feeling comfortable in our pews. After all, we mostly like our lives- we like our security and well being. We do not like to be ripped from our comfort zones.

But of course, following our Lord and savior Jesus Christ comes with a cost- the cost of discipleship- if you will. In fact Luther himself said, "A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, and suffers nothing, is worth nothing." Make no mistake about it, "taking up our cross and following [Christ]" (MK 8:34) can be difficult and sacrificing work.

Now I am sure many people here are wondering what this coconut and orange are doing up here with me this morning. Now don't worry, Pastor Sheldon didn't bring a snack with him because he anticipates a long sermon...Everyone can breathe a sigh of relief.

No, I brought this coconut, orange, and rope with me to talk with you about the infamous "coconut monkey" (for more info please see [www.http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coconut\\_monkey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coconut_monkey) ) So what is a "coconut monkey"? Well it isn't so much an "it", but rather a "how". You see the term "coconut monkey" refers to how some tribes in Africa hunt monkeys. These tribes hunt monkeys by taking a coconut and drilling a small hole in it, draining out the coconut's milk, and then placing a small tasty orange in it.

Right now you a most likely asking yourself, "What on earth does this have to do with monkey hunting, and further more what does this have to do with today's gospel reading?" I am getting to that, please indulge me and just give me a moment...

So then, with the coconut and the orange inside of it they tie it to a tree. No comes the exciting part. A monkey smells this orange and cannot resist such a tasty meal. So he swings down from his tree and goes to the coconut. Now the monkey is getting really excited. So the monkey sticks his hand into the hole in the coconut to grab his tasty orange. But, there is just one problem...

When the monkey goes to pull out his hand with his new orange he realizes that he cannot take his hand out of the hole holding on to the orange. Oh, the monkey's hand will fit in and out just fine- but the monkey cannot pull it out holding on the orange.

To get the hand out, it is necessary to drop the bait. The hole is also not big enough to admit the monkey's head. The monkey is, because of his natural inclination to hold on to the food, unable to let go of the food (this being a bad habit in general, but of course even more so in this particular circumstance). The monkey can't chew through the rope fast enough to escape the hunters, who hear the commotion or simply return at a determined time, and approach the panicked monkey who still cannot comprehend that he must drop and forgo the food, in order to escape with his life.

Even though his life is on the line...Even though he can clearly see the danger that approaches him...The monkey cannot bring himself to drop the orange and escape with his life.

And so you see, that is what all this has to do with today's gospel reading. Clear? good... Amen.

Well on second thought, it may not be that clear.

You see the monkey dies because he cannot bring himself to let go of that orange that he desperately wants. To save his life, all the monkey has to do is let go of the orange. It seems so easy doesn't it?

I think that we all know the truth. While these monkeys might seem pretty foolish to us- can we say that we act any different?

Do we not get fixated on the things of this world? Has humanity's pursuit of power, money, fame, and lust not caused countless "needless" deaths? Of course it has.

And in our personal and spiritual lives, we know that there have been times- countless times-we have strived to hold on to our sinful pursuits and objects to our friends' and our families' determent. It is OK to admit it, this is after all our nature.

But today, we hear Christ calling us to a new way of life. To those of us who have reached through the coconut and are holding on to pride, envy, vanity, greed- you name it- Christ tells us to let go and take up a new way of living. A way of living that follows him: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." (MK 8:34)

Is this an easy life that Christ is calling us too? No. In fact it is a life of sacrifice and service. Make no mistake about it, a life of faith centred on service in the name of our Lord is not a pick-nick in the park or a walk down easy street. And if anyone tells you differently, seriously question their credibility.

So why do it? To us here this morning asking that big question "why?"- why should we take this path? Christ answers us as only he can: "What good is it for man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?" (MK 8:36)

What good, indeed!

The truth of the matter is (and us pastors do not like talking about it) is that we ask Christians to be "losers". The honest truth of the matter is that we are called by Christ to "lose" our earthly-orange-grabbing lives in order to ultimately inherit our heavenly/spiritual lives.

Where you and I are now, in our lives; in our struggles; and in our cares; is all about losing. Now, a loser by our social standards is one who has failed to accomplish any relevant success or significance in his or her life. But by God's standards a loser is one who has totally dedicated his life to the will of Jesus. So please, if anyone ever asks you what you think about Pastor Sheldon, please respond, "To