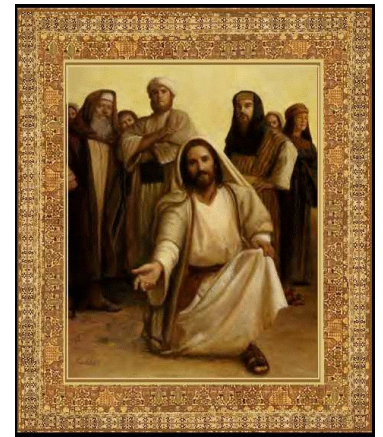


*St. Luke Fr. Lutheran Church*  
*Sermon by Pastor Anthony F. Schultz*  
*Lent 2 March 8, 2009 Mark 8:34-38*



Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

Ah, Spring training! Baseball has begun – the Cactus League – down in Arizona. Every year about this time – there is the National Anthem – "O'er the land of the free, and the home of the brave!" Everybody cheers – and the umpire yells, "Play ball!" Back in the day there was a short stop named Herman Long. Herman played for a bunch of teams – the Kansas City Cowboys, the Boston Beaneaters, the New York Highlanders. Herman was a very aggressive fielder – playing mostly shortstop for 17 years. He batted over .300 4 times – scored more than 100 runs seven times. In one double-header Herman – the leadoff hitter scored 9 times. That's a record that has never been equaled. And yet – you know what Herman is most remembered for? For the most errors! Herman made 1,096 errors! Imagine! He picked up the ball and dropped it. He picked up the ball and tried to throw it – but though his hand went forward – the ball went backwards! He picked up the ball and threw it into the dug-out! He threw it into the stands. He threw it over the head and reach of the first baseman. He threw it into the ground to the left – to the right – in the ground in front of the first baseman. He put his glove down – while the ball rolled right between his legs! 1,096 times Herman – the *flying Dutchman* – made an error. He messed up. How would you like it – if every time you made a mistake somebody wrote it down – kept track – marked it in a forever record book next to your name. Never mind that you tried as hard as you could. That you were considered by some to be the best ever at what you did. Still there is this nagging record that you also – simply because of volume – made more mistakes than anyone! If Jesus kept a record of wrongs – who could stand before him? But there is forgiveness with Jesus! Today God's Word comforts us:

**Jesus' Love Is Eternally Precious**

***Don't sell your soul***

***Don't be ashamed of Jesus!***

We always look at the context. What's happening around the Word of God we are concentrating on? Jesus' brief three year public ministry is fast drawing to an end. Jesus' death on the cross will be happening very soon. Jesus' preaching and teaching – if it's possible – takes on an even greater sense of urgency. You could see Jesus' powerful practical forgiving love in everything he said and did. Jesus was up by Tyre and Sidon – so far north of Galilee he was in Lebanon. There was a man who couldn't hear and could hardly talk. Jesus took him aside – put his fingers in his ears. Spit – and touched the man's tongue – and healed them both instantly and completely. Then he told the man don't tell anyone – *don't say a word about this!* And this man told everybody. That was absolutely the wrong thing to do. Jesus had to go some place

else. Jesus taught law and gospel to a crowd of 4,000 men – plus women and children who spent 3 days with Jesus listening – learning. By the end of that time – there was nothing left to eat – except 7 loaves – and a few small fish. Sound familiar? Jesus said his thank you meal prayer. Everyone ate and was full – and they picked up 7 baskets full of leftovers! Jesus' enemies came around and wanted a miracle from Heaven. Jesus told them no. Then he warned his disciples about the yeast of the Pharisees – nothing to do with barley buns! Jesus healed a blind man – a man who had often stumbled and walked into trees – bumped into trees – thought people looked like trees walking around. Jesus made his brain to catch up with the sensory overload of eyes that could suddenly see. Jesus told him – don't go back into town. Jesus wasn't the eyes, ears and throat doctor. He was the Messiah – the Savior of the world! Simon Peter understood and he didn't. One moment he said, **"You are the Christ!"** And the next minute he said Jesus should not be tortured and beaten and crucified. Jesus told Simon, **"Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."**

**Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."** Deny myself? Here is a place where I need to repent – because – instead of denying myself – I am guilty of indulging myself! I give in to myself all the time! Don't you? I dip each French fry into a little cup of catsup. I spread raspberry jam into the little squares of my waffles. I drink snooty coffee – and I very much prefer a salad fork to great big clunky forks – so at my house I always – *always* use a salad fork! That's ok. It's not a sin. But when we *indulge our sinful nature* that is wrong. If when we go out for Sunday morning brunch – and it's all you can eat – and we eat all we can – that's wrong. And if we starve our self – and treat God's gift of food as if it isn't a blessing – and make our self throw up – that's wrong and we need to get help – because we are doing harm to our body – the temple of the Holy Spirit. If we drink beers or 12 year old scotch or martinis to numb our self – from the problems our sins have caused in our marriages that's a sin. And if we do anything morally neutral to such excess that it's sinful – that's wrong. The Apostle Paul said spiritually we need to be like an Olympic athlete who goes into strict training. We need to be tough on our self – discipline our self – by the power of the Holy Spirit to do what we know in our *heart of hearts* is right. Pick up your cross and follow Jesus as close as he enables you!

**Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."** Take up your cross. Sometimes – we talk about crosses – as anything that is painful in our life. Like I'm color blind. That's not to say I don't see colors. But I can't tell the difference between some colors – especially reds and greens. Like if you decorated a Christmas tree with red bows – I would have a terrible time seeing the ribbons – they would blend in with the tree. When I was little I never had to match socks out of the clothes dryer – because I couldn't tell the black ones from the dark blue ones from the dark green ones from the dark brown ones. They all just looked dark. You might say, that's my cross to bear. And that's not wrong. But technically, *technically* – when Jesus says deny yourself and take up your cross – he's talking about troubles you have – because you follow Jesus! He's talking about persecution because of your faith. There are places in our world today – where you could be beaten to a pulp – literally hacked with machetes – stoned – thrown into prison – put to death – simply for telling someone Jesus is the Son of God – the Savior from sin – **the Way, the Truth and the Life!** The northern half of Nigeria – there are Muslims that would kill you. In India – there are Hindus that would put you to death. In Saudi Arabia – you could be attacked for simply wearing a cross on your lapel! Here in Watertown you will not be arrested by the police. You will not be tortured or have your house

burned down – you will not be beaten by an angry mob. But that’s not to say there isn’t danger. Go to talk to someone who is dealing drugs about Jesus and you can have a pit bull on a heavy chain wait as you walk toward the door – closer and closer – until they think you are in range. And then they will lunge – their powerful jaw gnashing and gnashing. You can be threatened by people who own lots of guns and know how to use them. You can have angry people – people under the influence of alcohol and drugs – people who are paranoid put their nose literally against yours and scream obscenities and threats at you. You can have people pick up boards and scissors and attack you. If you visit people in prison or hospitals where people suffer from *dementia* – there is danger that people who are not in their right mind might try to choke you because they are afraid and confused! If we actually suffer for the sake of the Gospel do not be surprised. The night he was betrayed Jesus told his disciples. **“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.”** John 15:18f

**What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?** Sell your soul? When we were at Northwestern College we read Johan Wolfgang von Goethe’s epic Faustus! It’s the classic story of someone selling their soul to the devil. For what? Faustus sells his soul in exchange for knowledge. Isn’t this the original deadly trap that Satan set for Eve and Adam? Taste this forbidden fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil – and you will know by experience the difference between good and evil – by having done something exquisitely evil? Faustus signs a pact with Mephistopheles – a demon. Mephistopheles will guide Faustus into all knowledge, insight and understanding. This knowledge will lead to power and control – and ultimately pleasure and happiness. Faustus will pay for this knowledge with his immortal soul? Oh, he thinks – somehow – in the end – he will discover an out – a way to escape without paying the ultimate – eternal price. Apart from Jesus’ blood bought mercy there is no salvation! Jesus paid the only ransom that could save people – his innocent life and his death in our place. Only Jesus could pay His Heavenly Father – to buy back your soul and mine.

**“If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.”** We not only live in an adulterous and sinful generation – we are part of this adulterous and sinful generation. We are guilty and we are accountable. Dead in trespasses and sins – only Jesus could save us. Uncle Terry is visiting us. He always tells us about how mission work – the power of the Gospel in Peru. There is a lot of crime in Lima – the same as any big city – especially one that is in the middle of the drug trade. When people are addicted to drugs – they become desperate and are willing to do almost anything – in order to get the money to buy drugs. They will do things like steal car parts. What an easy thing to do – with a cordless drill and a couple of bits – under cover of darkness you can go by a very expensive car – and zip, zip, zip and you have headlights or tail lights or any very expensive part for a Beamer or a Mercedes or your SUV. Now – you own a Beamer or a Mercedes or a nice SUV. And you come out first thing in the morning – to go to work – and suddenly you realize – I don’t know – your steering wheel is missing! What do you do? You go to the tough part of town – where it’s common knowledge – you can buy car parts. You need a steering wheel from a nice SUV? We just happen to have you – even the right color! What are the odds of that? You end up buying back your own car part! How silly is that? It’s redemption – literally pure and simple! Redemption! It’s exactly what Jesus did when he bought us back – not with gold or silver – but with his holy

precious blood and his innocent suffering and death. He did all that – that we should be his own and live under him in his kingdom and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness – even as he is risen from the dead and lives and reigns eternally. This is most certainly true!

I was driving to Church the other day – when a truck in front of me turned left onto 4<sup>th</sup> street – no turn signal – he just turned left. Then he slid beside a car waiting at the light at Main Street – stopped – then turned right – no turn signal. I thought to myself – at least he stopped – unlike the person in Madison in the VW Bug the day before – who had a red light – and rolled right around the corner – not even tapping the brakes. I went across Main Street. Somebody turned left into the auto parts store – again – no turn signal. At least they turned from the left lane. By the time I got to Western Avenue – a guy turned left from the right lane – no turn signal either. On my way home – I'm on 4<sup>th</sup> Street – going north – by the grave stone store – when a lady comes driving at me – wrong way – on a one way. She said, "I'm sorry!" – as she made a very quick "u"-y and headed past Rico's pizza! "I'm sorry!" Does that make it all better? It does! It's repentance! It's what we do when we sin. We tell Jesus, "I'm sorry!" "I'm sorry for the countless things I do wrong all the time." I'm sorry for all the good things I don't do. I'm sorry for all the mistakes I make that I don't even know I'm doing. I was going east on Main Street when I heard that little *brrrrruup* of a police car. I looked in my rear view mirror and there were those very bright red and blue lights – right behind me. Did I do something wrong? Was I a bad driver? Here I sit on Main Street with people driving by – waving to me! My brake light was burned out. That's bad. I didn't know it – and it isn't safe! So – down by Mr. Raduenz – with a little bulb for him to put in – and off to the police station – to show them! Did you think the worst of me? It's easy to see the sins – the failures and mistakes of the people all around us. It's harder to see our own failures. It's only because God is merciful for Jesus sake that we are forgiven of all our sins. That's what makes Jesus' forgiving love forever priceless! Amen!

To God alone all glory!

*Rev. Anthony L. Schultz*