

“Jesus is the Head of the Line”

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Pr. Tom Schoenherr

Have you watched a group of little people trying to form a line? They have difficulty accepting that not everyone can be first. Even when they are standing in line, and the line begins to move, they have difficulty accepting that they need to be looking at the back of the person in front of them. They want to move away toward the front, and so the line soon becomes just a bunch of little people moving in a variety of directions, like an amoeba.

It is difficult for us to accept and believe that Jesus is the head of the line, and that we, as Christians, are following Him. We want to be first in line.

Peter wanted to be first in line too, especially when he heard Jesus say what it means to be the Messiah. Peter and the other disciples are following Jesus because they believe he is the long-awaited Messiah who would save the people and restore Israel to the glory it had under King David. The disciples watched Jesus heal the sick, cast out demons, raise people from the dead, calm the storm, walk on water, feed the huge crowd with a little bread and fish. Their idea of the Messiah was to serve Israel and restore the glory days.

Jesus asks the disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” The disciples replied, “John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets.” But then the question becomes more pointed; “But who do you say that I am?” Peter is bold to say, “You are the Messiah.”

Then Jesus taught them that being the Messiah means suffering, rejection, being killed but rising from the dead on the third day. That’s when Peter took Jesus aside and told Him not to be talking about suffering and death. You just can’t recruit people to follow you if you talk that way. Why would anyone want to follow a crucified Messiah?

That is when Jesus tells Peter to get in line behind Him. He even calls Peter, Satan, because he is only thinking in self-centered human terms about preservation of the status quo. Jesus says again what it means that Jesus is first in line. “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up the cross and follow Me.”

We can understand where Peter is coming from, can’t we? As followers of Christ shouldn’t we be protected from suffering, be secure, and enjoy long life? We expect that from God. We want to preserve our lives, be secure, have good health and long life. We get enough rejection and suffering in our own lives. But then does Jesus speak to us when He says to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan”? Are we rejecting Jesus as the head of the line?

We want to have an invincible, self-sufficient, all-powerful God. When Jesus talks about taking up the cross, suffering, rejection, that seems foolish to us who measure strength by finishing first, power, invincibility.

Our God, who is all-powerful, who created the universe and keeps it going, is also the One who comes to us in a baby who had no place to lay His head. Jesus associates with sinners and outcasts, and is rejected to be last in line, taking up the cross for us. He dies for you and me and is buried, and rises again for us. Our God, who is invincible, lays aside His power and comes into our world of suffering, rejection and death. He takes up cross and He takes up our sin and our death, and through His resurrection gives us eternal life.

When Jesus is first in line and we follow Him, we know better who we are as Christians, cross-bearers, followers of Christ in the world.

When Jesus is the head of the line and we follow Him, we can keep on looking for ways to give our lives away in love. We think more of loving others than of being loved and cared for; more of forgiving others than of being forgiven. We can treat life like a special gift to be shared.

When Jesus is first in line and we follow Him, we also can empathize with those who are suffering in our world. As we receive Christ's life through the meal of the Holy Communion, we are also receiving the suffering of many others in our world who are bearing crosses we would find impossible to bear. We take up the cross with Christ and with all the people in need.

When my wife, Barb, was diagnosed with cancer in her uterus, I began to understand again what life means. Many of us may have had this experience,. Other things that we think are so important don't seem to matter when we share suffering together. At that point we may enter into the "divine things" that Jesus talked about with Peter, where God is one with suffering.

Jesus, who is the Crucified One is also the Risen One. The future does not belong solely to violence, terror, suffering and death, but to the Promise that no matter what may happen. God enters into our world with love and hope through the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We want to follow Jesus, who is the head of the line. Amen.