

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

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For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake,
he will save it.

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Since today *is* Father's Day, I thought it might be good to begin the sermon with some things we know about our Heavenly Father.

- ❖ He's *all-knowing*, so he *always* knows what's best for us.
- ❖ He's *all-powerful*, so he can always make that *happen*.
- ❖ He always *does* what's best or *gives* us what's best, no matter the cost, because he's *all-loving*.

In fact, because he is *Love itself* and he *created* us *for* his love, in *every* moment of our lives, God is *loving* us *into existence*.

- ❖ So then if he *stopped* loving us, we *wouldn't* have a bad *day*, we *wouldn't* drop dead; we would *cease to exist*. Poof, gone.
- ❖ SO as long as we're *here*, no matter what our *circumstances*, whether we *get* it or *not*, God is *loving* us.

To understand what that means for our *lives*, imagine that at the beginning of every day you walk to the grocery store on the way to whatever else is happening.

- ❖ You bring your little cart and their *world-class dietician* fills it up with *everything* you need.
- ❖ You head out with your cart and, over the course of day, you pull out different things to eat.
- ❖ But let's say that you're a *picky eater* or a *lazy cook*; unwilling to take the time to prepare a meal or learn how to use something unfamiliar.
- ❖ So you don't eat *everything* that's in the cart and at the *end* of the day, you're *hungry*.

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The same thing happens the *next* day, but there's *still* food in your cart, so you have to carry a small *bag* too.

- ❖ Just like the day before, you eat *some* of the food, but not *all* of it, and go to bed hungry *again*.
- ❖ As the days go by, you lose weight and often end up carrying extra bags, though you make some room every day by getting rid of the uneaten food that's spoiled.
- ❖ Until you learn to *cook* and eat something *other* than your *favorites*, you might have *some* good days, but for the *most* part, *instead* of eating and being *filled*, *life* will be eating *you* up.

And this is what Jesus *means* when he says, "whoever would *save* his life will *lose* it; and whoever *loses* his life for *my* sake, he will *save* it."

- ❖ When we try to save our *own* lives, we *lose* them because we can't *really* take care of *ourselves*.
- ❖ We get *picky* in what we'll *receive* from God or *lazy* in cooperating with what he's *doing* when it doesn't match up with our plans.

But if we recognize Jesus as "*the* Christ of God," and give our lives over to *him*, he shows us what to do with the *all* the blessings God gives.

- ❖ He expands our palate so we'll be more open to receiving what might seem unappealing.
- ❖ He shows us how to prepare the things that are unfamiliar, so that we can be strengthened and sustained instead of watching them spoil while we waste away.

Jesus tells us how this will happen when he says that any would-be disciple must "deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me."

Denying ourselves simply means getting used to *not* having our own *way*.

- ❖ Stop being *picky* by rejecting anything that's not *pleasant* and *comfortable* and ask God to *show* you what he's doing through *every* moment.
- ❖ Then *look* for opportunities to serve *others*, go *last*, or do *without* something, and ask God to work through those little denials.

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We *have* to learn to deny ourselves *first* because taking up our cross daily means *embracing* the fact that God is *always* blessing us, *right* where we are, no *matter* the situation.

- ❖ God *often* does the *most* for us through things we *never* would have chosen for *ourselves*.
- ❖ So if we're not used to *denying* ourselves, instead of *leaning into* what he's doing, we'll spend all our energy and attention *escaping* them or at *least* trying to take the *edge* off the suffering.
- ❖ There are so many beautiful things that God is trying to bring into our lives if we would just stop settling for something easier.

Finally, Jesus tells us to follow him because he shows us in his own life that God is always at work, even when it's unpleasant or doesn't make sense.

- ❖ But Jesus isn't just giving us an example to model our lives on, he's inviting us to stay in relationship with him.
- ❖ It's the difference between us thinking, "What would Jesus do?" and asking, "Jesus, what are you doing?"

We have to *stay* in relationship with Jesus because we *can't* figure it out on our *own*, and there's evidence of that all around us.

- ❖ People move from *one* place, job, or relationship to *another*, but find that the *same* pattern seems to emerge *every time*.
- ❖ *Others* remain *stuck* in difficult situations because they can't see *what* needs to be *different*, and *may* have even lost *hope* that it *can* be.

Jesus tells us to put *him* at the center of our lives because *he* is the face on the Father's *promise* the promise that no *matter* what life looks like, he *is* loving us through our every moment.

- ❖ the promise that even when it seems like everything can be taken away, he will not withhold any good thing from us.
- ❖ He is the promise that even in the face of incredible evil, no one will snatch us out of his hand.

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- ❖ He is the promise that even the darkest moments of life will not eat us up, but that we will have life and have it in abundance.

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