

## **DON'T WORSHIP ME, FOLLOW ME!**

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In just a few verses Peter moves from being the rock upon which Jesus says he will build his church to becoming a stumbling block, an impediment to the mission. Dr. Sheila McGinn, new testament professor at John Carroll University translates the word rock in last weeks gospel as the pebble that irritates. Now that certainly seems accurate in how Peter interacts with Jesus in today's gospel for Jesus is definitely irritated with Peter. Peter once again has gone from understanding and naming Jesus as Messiah and then falls flat on his face. What is so wrong about his statement when he says "No, this cannot happen to you."

The problem is that he really has not understood a basic lesson from Jesus or for that matter from God. God and Christ do not operate by our rules or follow our agendas. As humans we keep forcing our personality traits, feelings, values and standards on God and God just will not have it. Jesus rebukes Peter because Peter is expecting Jesus to play by our rules. Peter wants a nice safe God who takes care of the good. Peter wants a God where nothing bad ever happens to the good. Peter wants a God that we can simply worship. Jesus however has other ideas.

The key is that in both the Exodus and the Matthew readings the command is not to worship but to follow. Both are commands to be active in response to their experience of God.

Richard Rohr in his meditation on Saturday morning stated it wonderfully:

It seems to me that it is a minority that gets the true and full gospel. We just keep worshipping Jesus and arguing over the right way to do it. The amazing thing is that Jesus never once says "worship me!" He says, "follow me"

Christianity is *a lifestyle*—a way of being in the world that is simple, non-violent, shared, and loving. However, we made it into a clever "religion," in order to avoid the lifestyle itself. One could be warlike, greedy, racist, selfish, and vain, and still believe that Jesus is their "personal Lord and Savior." The world has no time for such silliness anymore. The suffering on Earth is too great.

In our Exodus reading the command to Moses is take off your sandals for this is holy ground and approach with a worshipful attitude, but more importantly to acknowledge that yes Moses, you have a holy task. Moses' cross is to go and do something that he feels totally and completely unprepared to do. Go back to Egypt, that he fled after killing an Egyptian and walk up to Pharaoh and tell him to let his

whole slave force go. Now by human standards this is a preposterous idea. No wonder Moses tries to get out of this assignment. Yet, the important part is despite his statements of inadequacy, he ultimately does say yes and God takes what Moses has to offer and sends him on his way with the power of God behind him. What Moses finally understood was that this was not about him, but about God.

In this the gospel passage, the follow me command is to deny yourself and take up your cross. The command is not to fall and worship the cross, but to set aside a selfish focus and move to a selfless focus. A mature relationship moves past I am safe and secure because I worship God correctly and therefore have my entry into heaven assured. A mature relationship with God gets past the us and them mentality and moves into one that denies self in a healthy manner and moves into love for others.

Jesus is the perfect example of selfless love. Secure in who he is, he gives all. Jesus doesn't want worship or adoration. Jesus wants followers who will go out and do as he has done. To act as he has acted and be willing to risk everything. Remember his command to "love each other as I have loved you."

That is what is expected by God from Moses and by Jesus from Peter and all disciples. To love others as God has loved you. God expects all of us to move forward even when the rules seem to be different from our human expectations. The challenge is the world focuses on an immature spirituality that rewards satisfying the ego and identifying with your group as the ones having the correct belief and therefore are saved. Jesus is worried about those outside of our group.

We cannot have a true and deep experience of God and then continue to function under our own rules. To say that Jesus is your Lord and savior and then not respond is the true silliness that Richard Rohr writes of in the passage I quoted. In his writings on a mature faith, Richard would say that before we can pick up our cross and follow him we must first put something down. That something is the ego that says we are the most important. That ego is both an individual ego and a corporate ego. That we worship Jesus in the correct manner and therefore are assured of some heavenly salvation is not the point of Christ's message. The point is that we live the gospel.

Part of this is the old question, if you were charged with being a Christian is there enough evidence to convict beyond a reasonable doubt? There is more to being a Christian than having the "right" beliefs and proper worship in a proper setting. Just because we walk in the door here does not make us Christian. What makes us Christian is what we do when we walk out that door. That is the cross we must pick up. Does what you do when you leave here show that you are a Christian? Does the life you lead and what you do show you are a Christian?

The cross that Jesus calls each of us to take up is different. I cannot tell you what it looks like, but I can tell you that it is the symbol of life lived by following Christ's teaching not just worshipping at his feet.