

Living Lent | Day 2

Growing Love for Others

Once when Jesus was praying alone, with only the disciples near him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" They answered, "John the Baptist; but others, Elijah; and still others, that one of the ancient prophets has arisen." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered, "The Messiah of God." He sternly ordered and commanded them not to tell anyone, saying, "The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."

Then he said to them all, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves?"

Luke 9:18–25 RSV

Encouragement for the Lenten Journey:

Growing up in Statesboro meant we were a short drive across the Ogeechee River to my Dad's home in Screven County. Trips to see my Grandmother Hagan in Newington often included a fifteen-mile drive to the next town over to eat a meal together. One trip, my younger brother, enthralled in listening to my Dad and his Mom retell stories about every barn, creek, road and home we passed, exclaimed, "This is like riding through history!" Despite his youth, he saw the connection between geography and stories.

Geography matters in the stories of the Bible too~except when it doesn't. This story, of Peter confessing that Jesus is the Christ, is one example. When the same story appears in Mark 8 and Matthew 16, both locate it as happening around Caesarea Philippi. Luke, instead, locates this pivotal moment around prayer and not a place.

Luke 9:18 begins, “Once when Jesus was praying by himself...”

It was Fred Craddock that first pointed out this subtle difference. Once I see it, though, it ripples out like a stone tossed into the water. I think about Jesus praying in the river being baptized and the Holy Spirit descending (Luke 3). I remember that Jesus chose the disciples after a night of prayer (Luke 6). I love that time when Jesus got away to pray after healing a whole town and then shocking the disciples by then changing locations to find more people in need of healing (Mark 1). Luke locating this story, where those closest to him first utter the words that will change history, reveals how intertwined prayer and the Kingdom agenda are for the Gospel writer.

The next moment after this is equally significant. After strictly instructing them to keep silent on his identity, not wanting to get ahead of the Holy Week revelation yet to come in Jerusalem, Luke connects “Who is the Christ?” with “What does a Christian do?” Jesus is the Christ and to be a follower means to lay down your life in service to others. Fred Craddock says, “Immediately after Jesus spoke of his own suffering and death was an appropriate time to call upon his followers to participate in the same self-giving.” May this season of Lent bring me to a place, not marked by geography but prayer, where Jesus’ love for me grows my love for others.

Contributor and Contributing Body of Christ

The Reverend Dr. D. Scott Hagan is the Senior Pastor at Statesboro First United Methodist Church, where the Church’s Mission is to serve, empowering people to live Christ-centered lives. This statement of Mission is seen in the Body of Christ through a number of service-oriented missions, including the support of Morningstar Children’s Home and active participation during the Day of Service Living Lent 2021. Reverend Dr. Hagan and the Reverend Stephanie Smith, Associate Pastor, have been intricately involved in the Living Lent 2022 planning stages and in the production of the Stations of the Cross presentation as a part of the Living Lent 2022 engagement on the Campus of Morningstar.

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