

Isaiah 50:5-9a

Psalm 116

James 2:14-18

Mark 8:27-35

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Whenever I open the web browser on my computer, the first screen that appears contains a news feed that scrolls through twenty or so of the supposedly top stories of the hour. I usually take the time to view all of them as they scroll by, knowing that about half of the stories are thinly-veiled advertisements, and the rest are hyped headlines enticing me to click on them and go to yet another screen containing even more advertisements. I fall for this ploy repeatedly, thinking that eventually I will find a story that is truly informative. Day after day I search relentlessly for some good news story that tells me at least one of the many contemporary problems facing our world, our country, or our church has been solved. Unfortunately, nothing ever seems to be solved. Problems are either kicked down the road, or they morph into other new, and often bigger problems, and I must take it upon myself to solve what I can and learn to live with the rest.

There is an admittedly odd parallel between my expectations for the news feed on my web browser and the disciples' expectations of Jesus in today's Gospel. In both cases, our expectations are unrealistic. When Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter's response, "You are the Christ." is, of course, correct. But Peter's reaction to the follow-on revelation that Jesus must suffer, be rejected, be killed, and then rise after three days shows that he really does not yet get it. Peter, and all the disciples for that matter, still expected Jesus to be the great fixer – the royal leader who would conquer evil and right all the wrongs

of their world. But Jesus did not come to fix things. He came to show us the way to salvation – a life-long journey that can be difficult and painful. Rather than taking the role of a triumphant conqueror, Jesus fulfilled the prophesy of the suffering servant that Isaiah described in our first reading. Jesus suffered humiliation and an agonizing death to show us how to endure the pains and difficulties of our lives and to lead us to everlasting life. Jesus' admonition to Peter to "Get behind me." was not the put-down that it may seem to be, but it is a command to "Follow me." Let me show you the way. I will get you through this.

Jesus' command to "Follow me" is calling us today just as it called Peter and the other disciples who were with Jesus on that fateful journey to Jerusalem. It is a call move out of the comfort zones of our lives and follow Jesus – to work for justice and to care for the poor, the sick, and the outcast of our time just as Jesus did in his time. You know, Jesus never asked us to worship him or to adore him, though it is certainly good that we do. But Jesus did ask us specifically and repeatedly to follow him, and that demands our special attention and wholehearted response. If we really believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we must act on it by walking in his footsteps. That is what James is telling us in our second reading. Faith without works is dead. It is not enough to thump our chests and proclaim Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. We must live that faith by our actions – with love and compassion for all.