

LOVE CALLS US TO “CROSS THE RUBICON”

Fourth Sunday in Lent

March 10, 2024

Love calls us to cross the Rubicon.

There were many people following Jesus when he spoke to them, tying **HIS** story to the story of Moses. He said: “just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.” He was reminding the people of those long-ago disobedient children of Israel wandering in the wilderness, being bitten by poisonous snakes, and dying one by one. God had told Moses to make a bronze snake and place it on a pole, and everyone, after being bitten, needed only to look to the snake on the pole in faith, and they would be healed. Jesus was telling them, that just like that snake, his body would be lifted up on a pole, so that all who would look to him in faith would be healed and have eternal life. Jesus’ self-sacrifice was his final example of having crossed the Rubicon.

Next, we read the most well-known verse in John’s gospel, John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” Yesterday Desiree and I saw this verse yet again, along with other signs, including “Jesus saves”. They were held up by a crowd of people standing on the corner of Laurel and 41. For many people like these, John 3:16 has become a litmus test to delineate between people like them who hold to a particular narrow understanding of Christianity along with a belief in Christian nationalism, and other people who do not believe as they do. You see, like these people, many misunderstand John 3:16.

This verse tells us that everyone who believes will have eternal life. The word belief is often equated with cognitive ascent; with holding to a set of Christian teachings or doctrines. But this passage speaks to much more than simply agreeing with certain doctrines. Some Bible translations use the word faith rather than belief in this verse. Faith is a better word choice. It does include cognitive ascent. But it also includes trust and reliance. You see, along with an ascent of the mind, faith must also engage the heart and soul. This is necessary in order to grasp faith's deeper, more personal sense of knowing and committing. Maybe we could translate the verse this way: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes; who has faith, and trust, and a deep reliance on him, may not perish but may have eternal life."

We are called to believe and have faith and trust and reliance on Jesus Christ. This is the path of discipleship. The Book of 1 Peter tells us: "Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation." Ephesians says: "We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine...we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ". God calls us to grow up; to grow into our salvation. Our spiritual journey develops as our passion for Jesus Christ grows; as we desire to know more of God; to hunger for more.

God, who is very love itself, calls us to cross the Rubicon. Jesus calls us to live out our faith as his disciples. Elsewhere in the gospels we read this: "One day when large groups of people were walking along with him, Jesus turned and told them, 'Anyone who comes to me but refuses to let go of father, mother, spouse, children, brothers, sisters—yes, even one's

own self!—can't be my disciple. Anyone who won't shoulder his own cross and follow behind me can't be my disciple.'" The infinite love of God calls us to cross the Rubicon.

So, what does this phrase mean? In 509 BCE the Roman Republic was established. It was divided into provinces, with a general and his army maintaining order in his land. One of the many Roman laws forbid any general from leading his army out of his province into another province. The reason was obvious. Generals, who usually enjoyed the feeling of power, would be tempted to take over a weaker adjoining province. This law was designed to maintain stability and security in the entire Roman Republic.

But there was a general in charge of the province of Gaul which encompassed most of western Europe and Northern Italy. He decided to take his army and march south towards the province of Italy, southern Italy. It was on the night of January 10th to 11th of 49 BCE that the general and his army approached the Rubicon River which designated the boundary with Italy. The general, Gaius Julius Caesar, stood there, on the banks of the river, looking into Italy. He knew, that should his army cross the Rubicon, he would be defying Roman law, and would set in motion a civil war. It is said that as he stepped across the river he uttered these words, "The die is cast". Thus began a three-year civil war that ultimately left Julius Caesar the undisputed ruler of the Roman world.

So, to use the phrase: "cross the Rubicon," or, "the die is cast," is to commit oneself to a course of action; to make a decision, from which there will be no return, no going back. For you and me, this is what it

means to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. It is to make Jesus' way of life, our way. This crossing may happen in a decisive moment of decision, or it may develop slowly in our lives over time, until one day we realize that for us, the die has now been cast. We have crossed the Rubicon. There is no going back.

Two-thousand years ago Jesus crossed the Rubicon during his forty days of temptation in the wilderness. He overcame each temptation with these words: "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." – "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" – "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."

For me, I crossed the Rubicon forty-seven years ago as a young Marine. From that point forward, there was no turning back. The die was cast. Libby Chinman is yet another example of many who have crossed the Rubicon. She has committed her life to the Christian way of discipleship. When I first met her, she was young in the faith. She enjoyed being a part of our Good Shepherd community. She was beginning to grow in her faith. Over time, as she attended the Ladies Bible Study and retreats, and four days at Cursillo, she realized that the die was cast. There was no going back. It is one of my greatest joys as a disciple of Jesus and as a priest, to see people growing in their faith; deepening in their love for God. To see them cross the Rubicon.

To cross the Rubicon means that you are no longer driven by what drives this world; possessions, prosperity, politics, sports, family, leisure, or even your particular religion. The die is cast when your greatest desire

has become is to live in the way of Jesus Christ. When your greatest passion is to hunger after God. You seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. So, where do you find yourself spiritually today? Are you still young in the Christian faith; learning and growing. Or has the die been cast, have you crossed the Rubicon? God, who is infinite love, calls each of us to mature in the faith, to become students and disciples of Jesus Christ, to cross the Rubicon.

There is a song that speaks to this decision, a decision to commit to following Jesus as his disciple, a decision to cross the Rubicon. Here are the words: "I have decided to follow Jesus. I have decided to follow Jesus. I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back. No turning back."

"Though none go with me, still I will follow. Though none go with me, still I will follow. Though none go with me, still I will follow. No turning back. No turning back.

The world behind me, the cross before me. The world behind me, the cross before me. The world behind me, the cross before me. No turning back. No turning back."

The die is cast. Love calls each of us to cross the Rubicon.