

Lent 2B. February 25, 2018. Dungeness Valley Lutheran, Sequim, WA. Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16; Psalm 22:22-30; Romans 4:13-25; Mark 8:31-38.

Then [Jesus] began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup>He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup>But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, ‘Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.’

<sup>34</sup> He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup>For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. <sup>36</sup>For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? <sup>37</sup>Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?<sup>38</sup>Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.’

I love going to see my doctor. She always shares some words of wisdom. At a routine Medicare appointment this week, she told me in her self-effacing way what a colleague calls the people they encounter in their practice. He said, “Remember, we see a lot of FIPS.” Formerly important people. “Yes,” I answered, “Lots of the people at the church I serve are FIPS.” And, indeed you are. Your resumes – past and present -- would astound head-hunters. A book of them would surely attract many a pastoral candidate.

Jesus was a FIP. Formerly important – remember his debut at the temple when he was only twelve? -- but no more: now the elders, chief priests and teachers of his religious tradition have rejected him. Jesus understood this rejection. “I will be killed,” he told his disciples. They groaned. If any of you said this to me, I would take you

aside, just as Peter did, and tell you to cut out that kind of talk. You have so much to live for.

But Jesus called Peter the Accuser, the Enemy, and told him he was setting his mind on human rather than divine things. Then Jesus went on to talk about self-denial, losing one's life, and taking up a cross. That would be like saying, get ready for the electric chair, the lethal injection, the bullet which will kill you.

This is not the kind of message that fills great churches with happy people expecting God to reward them for their religious piety.

This is not convenient.

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Tim Wu, a Columbia law professor, recently wrote a piece in the NYTimes, entitled "The Tyranny of Convenience." He talks of convenience as an ideal, a value, a way of life, and a fixation of our country. While convenience does open up possibilities that once seemed incomprehensible (I sure don't want to give up my dishwasher) and greatly helps us get through our busy lives, it also has a dark side. Professor Wu goes on, "With all its promise..., [convenience] ... threatens to erase the sort of struggles and challenges that help give meaning to life.... Created to free us, it can become a constraint on what we are willing to do and thus, in a subtle way, it can enslave us." [1]

Jesus was not a slave to convenience; he embraced the struggle and challenge that gave meaning to his life and to our lives. You do too.

It was not convenient for you who spent middle-of-the-night hours at the warming center this week. It was not convenient to take home young kids in a snowstorm after their choir concert. It is not convenient to save quarters for poor people to use in the laundromat, nor to give the equivalent of a vacation to your church each year. It was not convenient for the coach in the Parkland, FL, High School to place himself in front of his students to take the bullets intended for them. It's not convenient for young people to take up the challenge of trying to make their schools safer – in the face of derision, scorn, and argument. Very inconvenient. Peter wanted to spare Jesus the "inconvenience" of suffering and dying – before his time, as Peter saw it. But although Jesus knew that suffering would result, he continued doing what he came here to do even though it

made the people in charge angry. “It is necessary,” he insisted. Jesus focused on the inconvenience of divine things, not on the easier human things. Human things are attempts to save our skins regardless of what it might cost another. Human things are convenient. Divine things are the giving of life to another, regardless of the cost to yourself. Ray Dangman can attest to the value of a stranger giving stem cells for the life of another.

In this sinful world – Jesus called it an “adulterous and sinful generation” – life can be given in the form of forgiveness. The forgiver takes the pain of the offense upon him or herself. Jesus took on the rejection and humiliation, and kept on forgiving. He was the One whom the Father gave the world to forgive all our sins, regardless of the cost to himself.

Many think that Jesus died so that he could forgive our sins, that somehow God had to be bought off to free us from what we deserve. But Jesus entered this world with the forgiveness of sins already on his divine lips. He spoke and did it all over the place and people didn’t like it. They killed him to shut his forgiving mouth, and they nailed his arms out wide so that he would never again enfold anyone in a loving embrace and they nailed his feet in place so that he would never again take his forgiving walk through the world. They mocked him so everyone would know how foolish his feeble efforts to forgive sins really were.

And when Jesus was raised from the dead after those three days, he was raised so that he could keep on forgiving sins, even the sins of those who rejected him.

One who tries to save one’s life ends up losing it, while the one who loses life for the sake of the gospel ends up saving it. Jesus couldn’t be an eternal forgiver if he quit forgiving in the face of a death threat. He let death do its worst and he stepped up and kept right on going. He died because he forgives you and he rose so that he can continue to forgive you.[\[2\]](#)

None of this was or is convenient.

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This week the church commemorates several FIPS: people who chose inconvenient lives for the sake of others. People who picked up a cross and sought to follow Jesus. We commemorate the day they died, or as a friend of mine would say, “their birthday into heaven.”

George Herbert died in 1633 on March 1. An excellent scholar, he served briefly in the English parliament, then chose to become a parish priest. He was known for devoted care of his parishioners, as well as for writing poetry and hymns, including "Come, my way, my truth, my life."

Elisabeth Fedde, born on Christmas Day in Norway in 1850, died on Feb. 25, 1921. As a deaconess she established a medical house where she and her sisters lived and worked under harsh and primitive conditions. Challenged to start a ministry in [New York City](#), she wasn't one to waste time: nine days after she arrived in NY, she helped found the Norwegian Relief Society, visited the sick and distressed poor, and later opened a deaconess house and a hospital. In Minneapolis, Chicago and North Dakota she helped found hospitals. Exhausted by her thirteen years working in America, Sister Elisabeth returned to Norway and finally married her suitor whom she had inconveniently left behind while she worked in America.

John and Charles Wesley, commemorated on March 2 each year, led a revival within the Church of England that involved frequent communion and advocacy for the poor. Their work eventually led to the formation of the Methodist Church.

Charles – 18<sup>th</sup> of his parents' 19 children -- wrote 8,989 hymns, 10 of which are in our hymnal! "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing," "O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing," "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling," "Jesus, Lover of My Soul," "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today," and "Rejoice! the Lord Is King!"

While a scholar at Oxford University, Charles and two or three others celebrated Communion weekly, rose early, studied the Bible, and ministered in prisons.

The brothers spent two years in Georgia; there Charles was shot at, slandered, shunned and sick. While ill he wrote in his diary, "I labored, waited, and prayed," and eventually, after reading Martin Luther's book on Galatians, he wrote, "I now found myself at peace with God, and rejoice in hope of loving Christ."

John and Charles Wesley worked for [prison reform](#) and the [abolition of slavery](#).

The Methodists became known (and were sometimes mocked) for their exuberant singing of Charles's hymns. None of their work was convenient.

Polycarp, second century Bishop of Smyrna, and one of the Apostolic fathers, was commemorated on Friday. He is said to have been known by John, the author of Revelation and was burned at the stake at age 86 for refusing to renounce his faith. Not convenient.[3]

My own mother's death date was also on Friday. A fierce defender of Christian education, I credit her and my dad for my ministry, although neither of them lived to see me ordained.

Your lives are not convenient. You pick up crosses and walk in the steps of your Lord and Master. You astound me with your service, faithfulness and prayer. And, you know what, you are not FIPS. You are PIPS: Presently important people, or BIPS: Beloved important people. God's forgiven beloved. Today and always. Amen.

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[1] Tim Wu, "The Tyranny of Convenience," NYTimes, February 18, 2018.

[2] Paraphrased (from "many think") from a sermon by Lou Smith, beloved teacher, 1997.

[3] Bios from Sundays and Seasons and Wikipedia.