

# On Remembering and Following

*From a sermon by Pastor Dave Foncannon, preached 9/12/2021*

Scripture: Mark 8:27-38

My words begin with reflection today. I've been listening to pieces of different gatherings to remember the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the attack on the World Trade Center. We're told it's important to remember, to never forget. What are the memories we should carry? Certainly we should remember the nearly 3000 dead and their mourning families. We should remember the heroic action of first responders. We should remember those who have died because of chemicals they were exposed to as they rushed to rescue others. I'm sure many people, maybe most would want us to remember to hate the evil ones who perpetrated the attack. And they would want us to remember all who have died trying to right the wrong by entering, "The War on Terror."

I remember the day, where I was with my youngest son, and the sick, sinking, hollow feeling as the images played over and over. I remember those feelings growing as the country began to talk of retribution.

As I listened to the names being read today, I began to reflect on how many different places they seemed to come from. I looked it up – 158 countries were represented at the World Trade Center. I wondered what would have happened had the U.S. taken time to mourn with others and discern with others the path to take to find justice for the victims.

Sadly, we as a country took a very myopic view of how we should proceed. As we rushed toward vengeance we saw enemies everywhere. We followed false leads into war. We became mired in wars where goals were not clear and cultures misunderstood. It led us into dark places of torturing and imprisoning "enemies" in ways that compromised our American values and our example of striving to bring freedom and justice to our world. We need to remember we have lost even more than the numbers of initial victims. In many instances, we lost who we were.

A Brown University study looking at reports from October 2003 to October 2018 found that nearly half a million people had been killed in our wars responding to 9/11.



A November 2019 article in "Business Insider" broke down the numbers in the Brown study:  
6,957 were U.S. Military deaths.  
109,396 – 114,471 – Opposition Fighters  
7,820 – Contractors  
109,154 – National Military and Police who were working with us.  
1,464 – Allied Troop deaths  
    362 – Journalists and Media  
    566 – Humanitarian  
244,124-266,427 – Civilians

Remember? I hope we remember that these are not vague numbers, but PEOPLE. How many millions mourn these half million who have been taken by violence? They remember.

"Blessed are those who mourn," Jesus said, "for they shall be comforted."

As I reflected on all I was seeing and learning about 9/11 and all that happened in the following years, Jesus' words for this week kept whispering in my mind:

"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

Would it even be possible for a nation, even a "Christian" nation to have denied that initial impulse for vengeance and remember other words of Jesus? Could we follow Jesus when he says:

"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your father in heaven."

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth."

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

You see, in our scripture today, Jesus was still up north at Caesarea Philippi. He was giving another quiz, so he could start teaching "on the way" back down to Jerusalem.

"Who do people say that I am?" They answered. I was wondering how you hear people talk about Jesus today? Teacher, vengeful God, righteous judge? Who is Jesus?

"Who do **you** say that I am?" Peter had a good answer and also a misguided idea about what Messiah would be up to.

Jesus began to tell them about how he would suffer and die and be raised. Peter wouldn't have any of it. That was not his Messiah. Jesus shuts him up with the same words he used to shut up demons, then, Jesus called him Satan!

When the Messiah in your face is different than the one you'd been dreaming about, something is going to have to change! Jesus begins to teach them it is necessary for all these things to happen. It's the results of his challenge to the powers that be. He had challenged the powers to think about people over debt codes, to think about people over Sabbath "law", and his disciples to think about others over themselves. It felt like he was trying to turn everything upside down! Those who needed to tell people which way was up couldn't stand Jesus suggesting "up" might not be where they thought it was.

C. Clifton Black, a Princeton Bible Professor, had this paragraph in his commentary this week:

A thought experiment for this Sunday: in what ways do we pretend that Jesus didn't mean this, or try to be our own messiah's and save ourselves? On what do we stake our lives? In what do we ultimately place our trust? Our bank accounts? (Luke 12:16-20.) Achievements? (Matthew 7:21-23.) Prestige? (Mark 12:38-40.) Politicians?(Mark 12:13-17.) Guns? (Matthew 26:51-52.) Run down the entire list of familiar evasions and remember how Jesus locks every escape hatch. Doctrinal confusion is not the Christian's fundamental problem. Instead, it is disobedience: our refusal to accept Christ's authority over our lives.

Don't give me a big cross to carry, or one that might be too real. Don't give me one that might look too much like the Roman capital punishment for insurgency. Who wants to buck systems that help us get what we want? I just want to be a good person and carry a little cross.

Jesus bore the real thing, hoping we might catch a glimpse of the kingdom he said was right here. It's the one that shows up still when we open our eyes to see what Jesus was up to, when we see people the way he did, and when we follow him into our own transformation.