

## TAKE UP YOUR CROSS

Have you ever noticed what an emotional roller coaster ride life is. Things are going along wonderfully. Your job is secure. Your children are healthy and happy. You get along with everyone around you. You are at the top of the roller coaster. Then, all of a sudden, something happens. Perhaps it is a sickness, or the death of a loved one, or the loss of a job. And, suddenly, you are plunging down the other side of the roller coaster.

There is no one for which life was more of a roller coaster ride of ups and downs than Peter. He was a man of enormous passions. What he loved, he loved with all that was in him. But if he did not approve of something, he was not shy about saying so. As a result, he had an incredible ability to say the wrong thing at the wrong time. No where is this better illustrated than in Mark 8:27-38. In these few verses, he manages to confess Jesus as the Christ, which has to be the absolute peak of the roller coaster. Four verses later, Jesus rebukes him and calls him "Satan". I can not imagine a faster and more devastating fall! Why, we ask ourselves, did Jesus react so harshly to Peter's heartfelt desire that He not suffer? The answer is that the rebuke by Peter reminds Jesus of when He was in the wilderness. Satan tries to get Him to give up the Way of the Cross. "If you are the Son of God," Satan says, "Command that these stones become bread," or "...throw yourself down" from the pinnacle of the temple (Matthew 4:1-11). For Jesus, it is as if Satan has come back, not as a roaring lion or a cooing dove, but in the caring love of His closest friend. Jesus does not take the time to debate the issue. In a dramatic gesture, He rebukes His friend for being a stooge of Satan and a backslider from the mind of God.

I can never read the story of Peter's confession of Christ and subsequent rebuke by Jesus without wondering what I would say if Jesus turned to me and asked "Who do YOU say that I am?". I, like all of us, hope that I would confess Him as the Christ, the Son of the living God. I hope that I would call him my brother, my redeemer, my inspiration, my security. But if I am to believe that, what am I to do when, after He teaches me of the suffering and death that He is to undergo, He says "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."(Mark 8:34)? What does this mean to me? Does it mean that I must be hung on a cross and die that horrible death in order to be a true follower? No! The key to what Jesus means lies in Peter's confession "You are the Christ." Because Jesus is the Christ, He must suffer death on the cross.

That is HIS cross, not mine. MY cross, that Jesus calls me to take up, is that my life and actions must bear witness to my naming Jesus as the Christ. When others look at my life and actions, they will reveal that Jesus is MY Lord if I have indeed taken up MY cross. If I feed the poor, help the sick, visit those in prison, and, above everything else, love the unlovable, then I have taken up my cross. If, on the other hand, everything I do is self-serving, then my life is lost.

Life is a roller coaster ride. And God created us human. None of us should expect of ourselves to carry our cross, or live our life, as perfectly as Jesus did. But let us not forget Jesus' words to us "If you would come after me, deny yourself and take up your cross and follow me."

*The Rev. Bert Eaton is Rector of St. Peter's by-the-Sea Episcopal Church , located at 503 W. Broad St. in Swansboro.*