

The Gospel reading today brought to mind a quote from a preacher long ago, who said: “You cannot *succeed* preaching the *cross*. People do *not* want to hear that; *they already have enough problems*.” That’s a curious perspective—from a Christian.

Of course, it is true enough that everybody already has enough problems. And just trying to be a responsible citizen and a caring Christian in a world of so much news, it can feel like we have to *curate and titrate* which and how much suffering of the day to take to heart and mind. And, I’m pretty sure, that as the Renewal 2025 Task Force of the Vestry is imagining how best to look to the future of the life and ministries of Grace Church, that they have not considered a publicity campaign with a slogan something like this: “Come to Grace Church---and take up your cross!” So, no doubt the cross of Jesus is not something simply to be bandied about.

It isn’t surprising then that *Peter* reacted so negatively to Jesus’ words about this. Like the other disciples, Peter had experienced extraordinary things with Jesus, and legitimately had many hopes for Jesus and their work with him—and then to hear Jesus anticipate such an impending disaster—it would have been alarming and disorienting. Perhaps Peter had already stopped listening before Jesus even got to the last part about the resurrection—which would have been even more incomprehensible (and still is).

*But, even Jesus, if we remember, was not in love with the idea of the cross either. But he did so love the world that would crucify him. And he risked all divine prerogatives...in order...to stay on the path of divine love for the world.*

Such *divine love* was not unknown to the disciples—or any of the other Jews of their time. They already recognized it in *the extravagant and ceaseless gift of God’s creation of all things*—a creation that is wildly abundant—if not infinite...a creation that is continuing to unfold...a creation that greets every person in the world anew every morning, both the wicked and the good alike (Matthew 5:45), with new light and—possibly--a new beginning...and a creation that receives us all every night...in darkness and—hopefully--restoration...a creation that is the loving gift of God.

And the disciples of Jesus and the other Jews of their time knew the stories of *an ancient couple in Palestine, Abraham and Sarah*, whose lives and names were changed after receiving the unexpected and unimaginable word from God of his *covenant of love* for them...and their descendants--a covenant of love which would, eventually, from the Christian perspective, be for *all peoples* through faith.

*Jesus stands within this great biblical story...of the outreach of divine love...in creation...through the Abrahamic covenant...and more (Moses and David). God has repeatedly declared his love for the world...inviting our response. And this divine love is a real love, giving freely again and again, regardless of rejection, forgiving and giving again. It is the same love that is in Jesus...the same love that was rejected with the cross...the same love that raised Jesus from the dead...and sends the Holy Spirit.*

That’s what love does...*love gives*. Love is about a *desire for the other, a commitment to the other, that risks itself for the other*. Love draws us outside of ourselves. Even in gaining the world in different ways, we can end up living only for our singular self, or singular family, or singular people. But divine love is always about the other...and it is patient and kind...it keeps no record of wrongs...it bears all things...hopes all things...endures all things...love never ends (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

And so, the desire of Jesus was not for his cross...or anyone else’s. His desire was for the divine love for the whole world of us. And he was willing to risk the cross...to stay on that beloved path.

Perhaps then, a better slogan for our parish, if we ever have one, might be something more like: “Come to Grace Church—and join in the love of God for the whole world.”