

GOSPEL MESSAGE

September 15, 2024

LECTIONARY 24

Falling in Line

It is never easy to think about bad things happening to the people we love. When unpleasant topics like illness or death come up, we're likely to say things like, "Oh, let's just not talk about it," or "It would never come to that!" So it is understandable that Peter scoffs when Jesus talks about his own suffering. Peter cannot fathom it. We, too, have a difficult time understanding God's ways, and like Peter, we sometimes resist when confronted with a hard truth.

However, Jesus is unfazed. There are many ways to interpret what he says in reply: Maybe it is a rebuke, calling Peter out when he got it wrong. It could be a protective statement, like a parent calling out to their small child who has run too far ahead on the street; it may sound harsh, but it is love. Or perhaps it could be Jesus calling his followers to fall in line—a call to action. "We have places to go," Jesus may be saying, "and you cannot follow from the front."

Whatever the case, Jesus points to the cross and warns of its costs. For his disciples, it will mean taking a stand against the powers of the world, perhaps even against their own families. In our baptism, we are marked with that same cross, and Jesus calls us to the same mission: to pick up our cross and follow him.

We live in a complicated world, and sometimes the path of discipleship is unclear. Sometimes we get it wrong, or get a little too far ahead, or lose our way entirely. But we trust in Jesus, our wise teacher, to lovingly correct us and set us on our way again. Through the cross, God gives us life and gives us freedom to go out, confront unpleasant truths, and do whatever we need to do for others. Nothing stands in our way.

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