

Rev. George Arceneaux

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Second Sunday in Lent

This week, I've been reflecting on the Gospel and on the confession that we're going to do in just a little bit. And I keep thinking about temptation, and sin, and bearing crosses, and Satan, and man. Christianity is kinda dramatic. Between the literal devil getting a shout out in our text to our call to bewail our manifold sins that are grievous unto us, I can't help but feel like maybe the faith is a little bit extra. A little over the top. And probably a good gospel for me today as I feel a little ashamed at how intense the Gospel can be and Jesus talks about being ashamed of that.

But I keep thinking about the drama of Christianity and if it really is that applicable to our lives. Do we have, really, anything that is grievous unto us? Do we have anything that would provoke that cry "get behind me Satan?" And of course... the answer is yes.

I keep thinking about a little old church lady who was at St. Mark's, and how despite temptation... despite the grievous hardship that she bears because of our sinful world... she bears her cross for the sake of God's kingdom.

And in a word... it's because she in her mid-80s has accepted her grandchild transitioning gender. This woman, Jackie, had travelled the world and spent the last 20 years with her husband as pillars of the church. Just a year prior to my arriving, her husband had died, leaving her widowed and home alone for the first time in decades. She had grown up in the faith, had been raised in and raised herself a "traditional" household.

Yet everyday she prayed for her grandchild who was going through so much, from depression to nursing school to what she would, at times speak of, her grandchild's transition from being Jackie's

granddaughter. Jackie, with no sense of malice or anger or bitterness, spoke about how this was hard for her. Hard to call her grandchild by a new name, uncertain of terminology, and grieving her understanding of this person she. Jackie's and yet Jackie speaks proudly of her grandchild to this day. Speaks in support of them, celebrates their successes and stands with her grandchild in their challenges. She brought prayers for them every morning prayer we did, and kudos to the other ladies that frequented that space.

I suppose I bring Jackie up because that drama that I'm tempted to find a little over-the-top in relation to our lives... well it really isn't. Jackie is the least dramatic person on the planet... but the challenges of navigating this world are indeed grievous unto her. She bears the complexities of what others have as well standing beside someone who has transitioned, recognizing her own struggles but not putting that cross that she bears on anyone else, least of all her grandchild. And bearing the questions and complexities that she now faces in her 80s, that she had never expected in the prior decades, she affirms and loves her grandchild.

Her response has been, to me, Christ like for all the above, and because she like Jesus hasn't fallen into temptation. I'm always tempted to read the stories where Peter messes up as moments where Jesus kinds just needs to dunk on him and help him understand something, but Jesus today? His response to Peter? I don't read it as didactic. I don't read it as him just trying to teach Peter something, at least, not that first word as Jesus says, "get behind me Satan!"

I read it as Jesus defending himself. As Jesus putting into practice ahead of the crucifixion the strength he found resisting temptation in the wilderness.

Because Jesus so easily could have abandoned the mission for which he was sent. Jesus easily could have stopped preaching, could have stopped speaking truth to power, could have stopped

advocating for the least among the world. And he knew he could. And could have avoided the humiliation and death on the cross.

But he didn't. He did not shy away from what he was called to do to make this world more loving; to hope in the world where people were tortured to death publicly on the cross.

Feel the same strength from Jackie. Easier, I think, it would have been to simply call her grandchild by their given name and say she had a granddaughter. To find some other way of ignoring who her grandchild is. She could have spoken in bitterness and anger, said that her grandchild had made a decision that had hurt the family and herself.

Instead she bears questions she had never asked before with grace and curiosity and above all walks towards love.

We are called to do no less. The brokenness of the world is indeed grievous unto us. Our ignorance, our mistakes when we DO suffer temptation and hurt others for our own sake, there is a wickedness in the world and we can act wickedly. I know I can. But Jesus reminds us that we are always able to pick up our cross again and follow him.

The great thing is, we don't bear our crosses alone. Jesus is beside us, and if that's hard to see because hey, I mean, there's not literally a middle-eastern dude in a toga giving you life advice in your living room. That's one of the reasons we're all here. I've been buying this house and getting ready to have a baby and figuring out what this whole rector thing is about and people including you! And I mean that because I've had an interaction with everybody in this room and if you're new, guess what, you've given me an immense and joyful strength just by showing up, you all have helped me bear the struggles and questions and worries and doubts that come up for me.

Whatever it is you're bearing, even if you're like my friend Jackie, and you think you don't have too much significant going on or you're quiet as can be like her who was about as dramatic as standing in line at the DMV, your life is as significant and subject to the sin in this world and grace from God as anybody else's. Don't be tempted to think that there's ANYTHING that God will not help you to bear and this church is gonan try its darndest to help too. Because whatever it is that wants to get you down, it pales in comparison to the good that God's calling you to. Amen.