

## Suffer or Skedaddle? *Mark 8:31-38* | 2/25/2018

Skedaddle. You know what the word means: to run away quickly. As in, “When the police showed up at the keg party, the teenagers skedaddled.” But do you know where the word “skedaddle” comes from? It appeared during the Civil War and was used to describe a flight from the battlefield. It may have come from a Scottish or Northern English word meaning to spill or scatter — in particular to spill milk. The sight of blood being spilled on the battlefield probably caused Civil War soldiers to say “skedaddle” when they made a rapid retreat from the fighting.

There are a number of words in our civilian vocabulary that have a military origin. Almost every outbreak of war spawns new words, and this terminology quickly slips into everyday use. Warfare is responsible for words such as:

*Undermine.* You might complain that your colleagues are undermining you, and this can certainly be frustrating and damaging. But in the 14th century, undermining was a military term for digging a secret passage under a building to bring down a castle or some other fortification. So be glad that your coworkers are not undermining you ... *literally*.

*Flak.* Celebrities catch a lot of flak for idiotic behavior — and they deserve it. But when the word originated in the 1930s, it was short for *Fliegerabwehrkanonen*, a German word for anti-aircraft guns. The bursting shells from these guns were a lethal threat to airplane crews, and were infinitely more damaging than the words hurled at people today.

Even the war in Iraq contributed new vocabulary. *Hillbilly armor* is a term for the scraps used by resourceful soldiers to make their vehicles bulletproof. And an *IED* is an improvised explosive device — a homemade bomb. A recent article in *GQ* magazine about inappropriate office-party behavior included this warning, “The workplace minefield is hard enough to negotiate without planting your own IEDs.” So if you go to an office party, don’t forget your hillbilly armor!

In the eighth chapter of Mark, Jesus predicts his suffering and death, rebukes Peter, and challenges his followers to lose their lives for the sake of the gospel. The vocabulary of discipleship is not always peaceful, since it includes calls for self-sacrifice and predictions of suffering. To be a follower of Jesus is a life-and-death battle — challenging, stressful and painful.

Before we fall into formation behind Jesus, we need to count the cost. We don’t want to be like the original disciples ... and skedaddle, like they did in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Mark tells us that Jesus began to teach the disciples “that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again” (8:31). These words set the stage for the drama of the remaining chapters of the gospel of Mark, right through to the death and resurrection of Jesus. The vocabulary of this verse is a violent shock to the disciples — they cannot believe their ears when Jesus says that he must suffer.

In their eyes, Jesus is the Messiah, the Anointed One of God. They know him by the powerful titles “Son of God” and “Son of Man.” They expect that he will exercise authority and establish the kingdom of God on earth. They see him as their divinely chosen leader, and they are anxious for him to show his power as God’s anointed king — maybe even by overthrowing the hated Romans who rule the land.

But Jesus says that he must undergo great suffering.

This would be like a newly inaugurated president of the United States, in his first address to the nation, proclaiming, “I must undergo great suffering and rejection, and be killed by the people of this great country.” It would be completely unexpected. Unbelievable. Unacceptable.

Peter may think that Jesus is insane. According to Mark, he took Jesus aside “and began to rebuke him” — the verb for “rebuke,” *epitimaō*, is strong language, often used in reference to silencing demons. So Peter is hitting Jesus with some serious flak.

Jesus responds by rebuking Peter with the words, “Get behind me, Satan! He wastes no time in undermining Peter, because he is convinced that Peter is charging in the completely wrong direction, toward the earthly instead of the heavenly. These are fighting words — the language of silencing demons and scolding colleagues. As violent as it sounds, it is the vocabulary of discipleship. But what does it mean?

With these words, Jesus is making his position clear. He is not the United States Secretary of Defense making decisions about military matters from a position of safety many miles from the fighting. Instead, he is down in the trenches with his comrades, on the front lines of the spiritual battleground.

When he says that “the Son of Man must undergo great suffering,” he is speaking in a very matter-of-fact way about what lies ahead for him. Rejection by the elders, the chief priests and the scribes — that’s inevitable for someone who is willing to buck the religious establishment and show people a new way to God. Even death makes sense when you are determined to march into a hostile city, upset the tables of the money-changers, and predict that the temple will be destroyed.

Jesus is willing to put his life on the line as he moves toward his destiny in Jerusalem. He is not a basket case, but a person determined to devote body, mind and spirit to the work that God has called him to do. He’s not interested in satisfying the expectations of others, not even the dreams of his closest friends. All that concerns him is doing the will of God.

There’s a message for us here, especially as we struggle to find our focus as Christians. In our multi-tasking world, we have a hard time sorting out the competing demands of family, work, community, friends and church, and our endless activity can leave us feeling scattered and even shattered. With remarkable clarity, Jesus gives us a new vocabulary for discipleship.

“The Son of Man must undergo great suffering,” says Jesus. And so must those who follow him.

Now this is not to say that suffering is pleasant or desirable in any way. We shouldn’t seek it for ourselves, or overlook it in others. But Jesus knows that there are some things worth suffering for — and so do we, if we think about it. A soldier on the front lines, fighting for freedom and justice. A mother in a delivery room, giving birth to a baby. A student, staying up all night to read a textbook. There are some kinds of suffering that produce great good.

Unfortunately, we live in a society that avoids suffering at almost any cost. We want our military to be successful without any sacrifice from civilians. We want more social services without higher taxes. We want to lose weight without cutting our calories or increasing our exercise. We don’t want to suffer.

But the vocabulary of discipleship includes suffering, and Jesus sees it as an important part of marching on the pathway to God. There can be no love without suffering, because love always involves an element of self-sacrifice. We simply cannot mature into the loving and sacrificial people God wants us to be, if we skedaddle away from suffering.

Jesus illustrates this life of loving sacrifice by lifting up the image of the cross. Calling to both the crowd and his disciples, he says, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

This is not a call to skedaddle; it’s a call to suffer. This is a Christian call to arms, in which followers of Christ are asked to take up a cross instead of a weapon. Our struggle will involve both love and suffering, and it will certainly include self-sacrifice. But if we set our minds on the things of God, we will receive the riches of everlasting life, and we will know how to answer the question of Jesus, “What will you gain, if you own the whole world but destroy yourself?” (v. 36, CEV).

Jesus doesn’t want anything to undermine our life with God.

During the season of Lent, let’s not forget that our deepest convictions come out of an experience of spiritual conflict and struggle, one that includes suffering and death ... but also everlasting life.

That’s the vocabulary of discipleship.

*Pastor Keith*

## Children's Sermon

Hold up a trophy, and ask the children if a person with a trophy usually gets a lot of attention. Point out that trophies are given to people who win big games or contests, and these awards usually make the winner feel very good. Talk about how people who win one trophy often want to keep playing and win additional trophies. Then ask them if Jesus gives us trophies for being his disciples. No! Let them know that Jesus says, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34). Stress that Jesus wants us to hold up a cross instead of a trophy, and he wants us to follow him instead of chasing after big awards. Admit that this is a very hard way to live because we all like to be winners and get lots of attention. But let them know that the biggest prize of all — everlasting life with God — is given to people who deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Jesus. Lift up your trophy, and say that everlasting life is much more valuable than any award we can get on earth. Close by encouraging them to focus on Jesus instead of on trophies and to trust that the greatest prize of all is given to people who follow Christ every day.