



This year's emphasis in JCC is **DISCIPLESHIP**. In today's Gospel text, Jesus explains to us what it means to be His disciples.

We read of Peter's shocking act of rebuking Jesus and trying to stop Him from fulfilling God's mission. If Peter and His fellow apostles who were personally discipled by Jesus could get it wrong, we would better be careful and learn from their mistake. We may think that it won't happen to us. Think again; we should realise that discipleship is not as simple or easy as we think.

Do you struggle to be a consistently faithful disciple of Jesus?

As we read today's passage, I would like us to consider the following question: **Are you God's building block or Satan's stumbling block?**

1. **From God's Building Block to Satan's Stumbling Block**

Firstly, we look at how Peter fell from being God's building block to become Satan's stumbling block.

- **Failing to understand Jesus' explanation (v21), Peter fell from confession (v16) to confusion (v22).**

In v16, he confessed that Jesus is the Messiah (or the Christ), the Son of the living God.

In v21, Jesus explained what his messiahship means: that He has first to suffer, to be killed and then be raised to life on the

third day. The disciples heard it, but they did not understand why and thus they did not accept it.

“Peter’s harsh rebuke resulted from his failure to understand and to envision a Christ who must suffer and die. Such a Messiah was not part of Jewish thinking at that time.” (TLSB)

They did not understand the role of the Messiah or the Christ in the redemptive plan of God, nor the larger picture of the Messiah’s role in the salvation plan of God for the world. According to the disciples’ understanding (or rather, misunderstanding), the Messiah was expected to arise as King of Israel to save them from the Roman oppression.

Peter fell from confession to confusion.

- **Jesus’ spiritual discernment (v23)**

Jesus’ spiritual antenna discerned something suspicious:

- ❖ *Satan’s work* — Jesus discerned the source of the disciples’ rejection – i.e., Satan, the adversary of God, who tried to block Jesus’ mission to the Cross.

“Jesus addressed Peter as Satan’s spokesman because his counsel would keep Jesus from fulfilling God’s purposes.” (TLSB)

Like Peter, we are vulnerable to mistake Satan’s ideas as good ideas or God’s ideas. Our journey of faith is not always clear and straightforward.

- ❖ *Human concerns* — Jesus discerned that Peter had human concerns in mind, and not the concerns of God. Peter’s thoughts were governed by human values rather than divine values. He did not understand the theology of the Cross.

At times we may fail to understand God's ways, thinking that we know better. We have our own expectation of what God or the church should be or should do. Is there a breakdown in communication, or a misunderstanding? We all like things to be done our way, to persist in our own belief or mindset so much so that we even tell Jesus what to do.

When we follow Jesus, it is not democracy; it is servants learning to do things the Lord's way.

- **Can we fall like Peter and Jeremiah? (Jer 15:18f)**

Think for a moment, how often have we failed to understand God's will? We have our own thoughts about how things should be. For example, we may have raised our voices to God, saying:

Why did you let this happen to me? I don't deserve this. I worked so hard; I studied so hard; God, you are not being fair!

Oh, why did this evil and bad thing happen to such an innocent victim? God, aren't you supposed to be a good, merciful and gracious God? If you are almighty and sovereign, good should be rewarded to your people. This is only right and fair.

Even the prophet Jeremiah also felt angry with God. In Jer 15:18, he said, "Why is my pain unending and my wound grievous and incurable? You are to me like a deceptive brook, like a spring that fails."

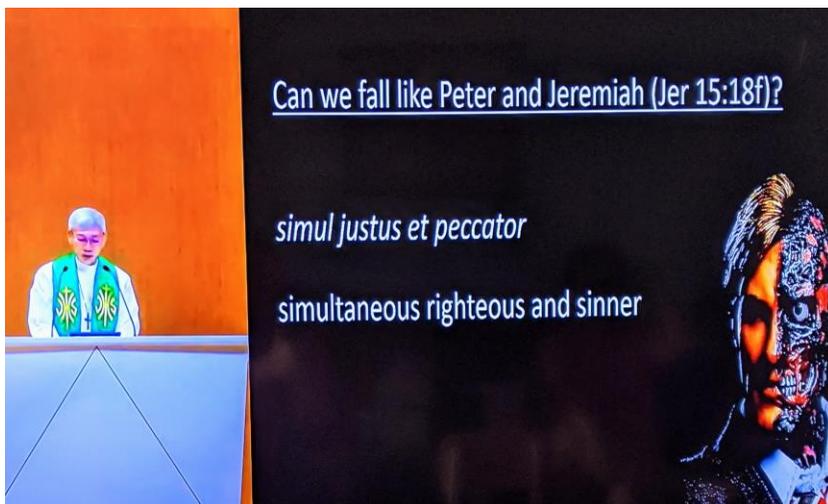
What is happening is that we are telling God that he should do things our way. "He is mistaken, and we are right. God needs a rebuke, a scolding sometimes."

In so doing, we fall from submitting to God to fighting God and that is exactly what Satan is seducing us when we are

frustrated in life, in our studies or our jobs or ministry or with God's leaders or even with God Himself.

We need to ask ourselves: Is it because we do not understand God's ways, or are we trying to achieve some goals that are not God's will but ours or our parents' or the world's expectation of what success is meant to be or what is normal in society?

- **simul justus et peccator – simultaneously righteous & sinner**



Luther's phrase "*simul justus et peccator*" means that we, as people of God, are simultaneously saints and sinners. Discipleship is not easy or simple because there are other forces that are opposing God. Besides Satan and his dark forces, there is the sinful nature in all of us. Our sinful nature can fall into Satan's schemes to fight God. Jesus has imputed His righteousness to us; but while we wait to be glorified and perfected in Christ, we remain sinners.

We are simultaneously saints and sinners. That's why discipleship is not as simple as knowing the truth or theology but applying it. So, I call it Jesus' 'App' For Discipleship.

2. Jesus' 'App' for Discipleship

It is neither an Android nor Apple App. You can't download it because it is not a computer program. It is the Cross. Without the application of the Cross, we are not disciples. No cross-carrying, no discipleship!

Jesus says, **“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” (v24)**

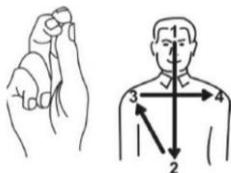
Jesus told Peter, “Get behind me.”

The problem with Peter was that he was trying to get ahead of Jesus, rebuking the very plan of God. Peter's place is not ahead of Jesus. Peter's place, our place, is behind Jesus. We are called to be followers.

How do we follow Jesus? Take up the cross, forsake the world and all its entertainment and be prepared to lose our lives for Jesus. This is discipleship, to follow Jesus, carrying the cross. But Peter wanted to wield the sword. He didn't know that discipleship is carrying the cross, not a sword. How do you carry the cross?

- **It's a gift of God – “take up their cross”**

The cross has been given to you at your baptism. Jesus says to take up your cross. It's already given to you. You have to take it up and apply it to your life.



How do we apply the cross? One helpful way is to sign the cross on yourself. Use it every day like your favourite app when you wake up and before you sleep; so next morning when you wake up and are

tempted to reach out for your phone, you should first sign the cross on yourself and pray.

Luther suggested signing of the cross as a daily practice in his Small Catechism. “In the morning when you get up, make the sign of the holy cross and say: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

It is a matter of Christian freedom whether you want to practise it or not. It’s given to you at your baptism when a pastor signed it on you.

Now, how does signing the cross apply its work on us?

Signing the cross is applying the work of God in our baptism. It is not the act of signing the cross itself that magically confers something. It is acting out in faith the act of God in baptism. It is applied to put the sinful nature to death and a new person is raised up in a daily discipline of repentance and faith.

Die to our sinful desire to live our own life apart from God to gain the whole world. Don’t underestimate the power of the sinful nature. Some would even give their soul in exchange for a good life on earth.

Some people would rather die than suffer because the sinful self does not want to deny our self to live in pain or poverty, but they forget about judgment day when Jesus comes with his angels to reward each person accordingly.

- **How To Carry The Cross**

How do we apply the cross in our day-to-day living? How do we practise denying ourselves to follow Jesus? How do we live out our baptismal faith as disciples of Christ? Carrying the cross is not just about the negatives of denying and dying. The cross gives us new life – loving, joyful way of life.

“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.” (Rom 12:9-10)

What should characterize Jesus’ disciples above all is loving one another as Christ has loved us. Unconditional love, practical love.

Are we really devoted to one another in love? If we are, how much do we see our brothers and sisters? Do we even take the effort to connect with each other? Do we remember to pray for each other? We’d usually pray for ourselves, our studies, our jobs, our family, our children’s exams.

Let’s carry the cross by looking beyond ourselves to our brothers and sisters. For application, carry your cross by reaching out to someone in love this week.

“Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.” (Rom 12:11)

Are you discouraged and losing your spiritual fervour in serving the Lord? It happens to all of us. Why? Because we encounter stumbling blocks. How can we revive our zeal and spiritual fervour? Turn our eyes to Jesus. In 1 Sam 30:6, we read that David strengthened himself in the LORD, His God.

Whenever I feel discouraged and my zeal is flagging, and my spiritual fire is low, I would wait upon the Lord. I may need to rest from serving, but I will recharge by seeking the Lord.

“Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run

and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” (Isa 40:30-31)

That is how we can **“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”** (Rom 12:12) Even in these tough times, when we are stressed and frustrated, we can still be joyful. We can be patient and be prayerful. When we die to depending on our own strength, resources and abilities, we can be joyful because our hope is in our gracious and mighty Lord.

I have a friend whose wife was afflicted by lung cancer, 4th stage. When the children knew about it, they blamed God. It is not so easy (in fact, impossible) to be patient in affliction except when we are prepared for death by placing our lives and our loved ones in the hand of a good God who is our resurrection.

Faithful in prayer — Did you pray before service today? We are faithful to our own pleasures. We must have our twitter, our Instagram, look at our Facebook, or have our coffee fix first thing in the morning; but prayer, well, it is not a habit.

“Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.” (Rom 12:13)

This seems straightforward, but the key word here is “practice”. What is hospitality? I’m afraid we may not appreciate it because we don’t practise hospitality as a way of life.

Yes, we do it in church or for S3P (for the homeless). But when was the last time we opened our homes for the needy? We should also share with the Lord’s people when they are in need whether they are our members or not, other Christians from other churches, tenant churches, and beyond Singapore.

Up to this point, we realise that we all fall short of being the Christians our Lord desires us to be. It is not easy to be practising disciples. It is not easy to carry the cross. This is also true for Jesus' disciples. However, our Lord is gracious.

3. [Grace for Christ's Disciples](#)

Matthew wanted to show the fulfilment of Jesus' promise that **“some standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom”** in the Transfiguration.

We see Jesus' promise in Mt 16:28 being fulfilled in the passage immediately following, in Mt 17:1-8. On the mountain, Peter, James and John saw Jesus transfigured in glory. He was in His Kingdom, with the Father and the saints like Moses and Elijah. The Good News is that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is given to all his disciples including Peter who was used by Satan to block Jesus' mission to the Cross.

Like Peter, we often fall in our journey of faith; and like Peter, we can have hope – he was given the grace to see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom.

We know Peter would later fail Jesus again by denying him 3 times.

We know that we will struggle to carry the cross as disciples. However, the Good News is we know that God's grace is sufficient for us. We shall see Jesus coming for us in His Kingdom one day and we look forward to it.

Thanks be to God!

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