

According to google, the cross would have weighed about 100 pounds. There it is, right in the middle of Matthew's gospel, 100 pounds of history and suffering and injustice. And if Jesus is who Peter claims he is, there is 100 pounds for which there is no reasonable explanation.

So Peter asks the question that all humanity has asked – if not for themselves, then for their loved ones – is there any way around all that suffering?

And if Jesus is who Peter claims he is, the answer is No.

Peter does not like that answer for Jesus, and I am suggesting that Peter didn't like the logical implications of that answer for his own life.

There IS no way around the suffering. Not for Jesus and not for Peter. and not for you or for me either.

You and I may choose not to focus on this reality, but that doesn't change it. Possibly in this precise point in time, when we are weighed down by the enormity of human suffering –

 rampant fires in California, violence against fellow citizens,
 hurricanes blowing away communities in the Gulf, upheaval in political systems,
 hospitals overwhelmed with patients in critical need, people desperate for work and food,
 possibly we have grown weary, and, in the face of all the powers that are crushing human life, we are ready for it to be over.

So just as Peter tries to silence this rabbi from Nazareth, we want the protesters to leave the streets and the political pundits to mute their commentary.

 We want to wake up to a non-covid world where we don't have to listen or respond to all the cries for
 justice around us.

If necessary we will turn off the news and deaden our senses to the videos of abuse and violence and pretend that since we know none of the hungry and unemployed they no longer exist.

Just like Peter pulled Jesus aside and insisted that ‘this may never happen to you’. We want to turn aside and refuse to talk about it. Like Peter, we want to find away around all this suffering.

But there it is, right in the middle. A 100 pound cross which cannot be ignored.

Jesus is insistent. This is the path that is planned for him, and it WILL happen, and all who follow him will, in their own time, be faced with a cross as well.

Jesus insists that this is the God path – a path that is powered by love which leads to life. For Jesus AND For each of Jesus’ followers.

What does this say to us today – at a time when we are weary of social distancing, weary of demands for justice, weary of feeling wrong and confused. When we are even growing weary of doing good.??

What does it mean that we are to follow Jesus to the cross? Why all the suffering?

Consider this:

In ordinary times, most of us have known trouble of some kind. We have known pain and loss; disease which takes lives too soon.

Some have known times of insecurity because we were left behind by policies and programs that benefitted others but not us.

Some of us have faced discrimination, pushed aside because of our gender or age or ethnic background. Perhaps you’ve been ignored, and excluded from the table where decisions are made. None of this is unusual.

When this kind of trouble comes to the ones we love, we ***stand with them***, lend them our strength, comfort their sorrow, walk with them into the future. ***We do this out of love because love carries responsibility for the beloved.***

In this same way, Jesus stands with us. He walks in solidarity with us – hungry for his next meal, tired after a long day, ridiculed by the religious leaders and under threat from the political rulers. Satan tried to turn him away from this path of solidarity out there in the desert: turn these stones into bread and take care

of yourself, he says, you are important. Jump off this tall building, prove your amazing powers and test God's reaction time. Worship me and I will make all of this world's trouble go away and name you ruler of all.

Today we hear Satan speaking through Peter as he once again tries to turn Jesus away from his solidarity with those around him: his new family, brothers and sisters of every color and belief and gender and age. Peter whispers: avoid the suffering. Walk away from the cross.

And perhaps if Jesus didn't love us so deeply he would have, but love stands alongside the beloved. Love has responsibility to the beloved. In this world, suffering will come to each and every one of us. Jesus will be there, standing next to us, out of love and he will lead us into life.

In these extraordinary times, we are being asked to stand next to
people who we don't know,
people who have experienced violence and loss which we don't
understand,
alongside folks who have faced discrimination and rejection.

We are being asked to re-examine our own prejudices and bias **and change our ways** because it causes suffering to others.

We who have been showered with Jesus' life giving love: a love of acceptance and hope and forgiveness, are to stand with all the others whom Jesus loves as well.

We are being asked to walk the path trod first by Jesus. Not because we understand but because this is the way of healing and wholeness for all of creation....through the cross of suffering and into the resurrection to new life – for all.

Why the cross? Because God so loved the world.....