

"Steps Toward the Cross"—John 18:1

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, "Steps Toward the Cross", is John 18:1 → *When Jesus had spoken these words, He went out with His disciples across the brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which He and His disciples entered.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

There is the desire of many people to experience a "closeness" to people whom they consider with high regard by "pilgrimages" of various kinds. Fans may visit the homes or mansions of the famous people to walk in some of their steps. Members of a family may visit the "fatherland" country from which their ancestors immigrated in an effort to "connect" to their "roots." Many Christians have shared their new perspective of reading the Bible from having walked many of the paths of the Old Testament patriarchs, Jesus or the apostles after visiting the "Holy Land." In Roman Catholic tradition one can feel like he is taking the steps with Jesus toward the cross by following something called the "Stations of the Cross."

During the Lenten season it is traditional in our congregation to attend worship on Wednesdays to focus on the passion of Jesus along

with the events leading Him to the cross. As we consider each “step” that Jesus took during His earthly ministry we begin to see that every turn and every move was directed to what He knew for sure was to come His way. Death by crucifixion.

In this text we find Jesus crossing *the brook Kidron*. While one may simply read this verse as just “passing” geographical information, the “steps” Jesus took to cross this brook were very significant. They led Him to that place where another step in fulfilling God’s plan of salvation for all mankind would take place—the Garden of Gethsemane. Actually, Jesus was walking into a situation in which there was no escape for Him. According to John 18:3-4 *Jesus knew all that would happen to Him in this place with His betrayal by Judas, taken custody by a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees.*

All that was taking place actually made no sense to His disciples even as it makes no sense to many onlookers today. Common sense should direct our steps if we are aware of a situation where our life is in danger, moving us to avoid it rather than walk right into it! This confusion haunted them with every step Jesus took as He led His disciple during His earthly ministry. On one occasion all Thomas could say was: *Let us also go, that we may die with Him* (cf. John 11:16)—quite possibly a statement made with the gesture of throwing up the hands in confusion, frustration or even anger!

Despite the “illogical” movement involved with Jesus’ steps toward the cross the Christian is awed by His willingness to walk this path. Even though Jesus was the second of the only two perfect men on earth, at any moment He could have chosen to follow the path of the first Adam and given in to the temptation of not obeying His Father’s will. I wonder how often people take the steps of Jesus toward the cross for granted. Sometimes we may act as if Jesus was just doing His “job” because it was expected of Him by God’s promises and prophecies of the Old Testament Scriptures. However, as true man He faced the same temptation we face—the temptation of failing to “stay the course” of faithfulness to our heavenly Father’s will.

Jesus said in John 10:18 → *No one takes My life from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from My Father.* You can quickly read this statement of Jesus, even thankful that He laid down His life for you and took it up again in His resurrection. But do you consider the full impact of **His choice** in this matter? Betrayed and abandoned by His own disciples; spit upon; mocked and slapped in the face; whipped and nailed to a cross. Philippians 2:8 described Him as willingly *humbling Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

However, such suffering pales in comparison to His real suffering on

the cross—experiencing your hell in the separation and rejection of His Father because your sin was upon Him. The greatest agony of the cross was expressed in His words: *My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?* Crossing the Kidron brook were actually steps leading Him to hell.

Unfortunately it is easy in our sinfulness to forget that this was something Jesus did **willingly** and act like entitled Christians, thinking that Jesus “owed” us this act of grace. “After all, His whole purpose for coming was to deal with my sin. What else would I expect?” Such an attitude displays itself by ungratefulness and by using our freedom in Christ to indulge in sin with no thought as to its serious nature which took Jesus to hell. 1 Peter 2:16 tells us to *live as people who are free*,—that is, freed from the power of sin, death and devil through Christ’s life, death and resurrection—*live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as **servants of God***. (cf. Galatians 5:13) We don’t abuse grace. We humbly receive grace by faith with an undeserving attitude of thankfulness and obedience to Jesus in the steps we walk each day. (cf. Romans 6:1-4)

An amazing thing about our Savior is that He took these steps toward the cross **joyfully!** Amidst all the events connected with Lent and all that awaited Him on the other side of this *brook Kidron*—the agony in Gethsemane; the betrayal by Judas; His unjust trials; the beatings and crown of thorns; the nails and cross; the mocking; and especially the

pangs of hell itself—it's hard for us to see any joy in Jesus' steps. Yet, Hebrews 12:2 says that *for the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame* of it all. What joy?

You. You are His joy! You are the one for whom He **willingly** took the steps to the cross so that you can be completely forgiven of all sins for all time! *The joy that was set before Him* was making it possible for you to come in humility, repentance and faith in His Person & Work to receive forgiveness, life and salvation, **accomplishing all that necessary for you to have it all!**

Seeing the importance of each step Jesus took toward the cross **willingly for you** brings forth gratitude, reflected in the steps you take to the cross in repentance, empowered by the Holy Spirit to walk away from the cross in faith and good works. It will involve dealing with struggles in sin everyday as you take His cross with you. Jesus said in Luke 9:23 → *If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.* His cross has become your cross by faith. This is why you received the sign of the cross on your forehead and on your heart at your baptism to mark you as one redeemed by Christ, the Crucified. Because you are His joy, His redeemed!

The Holy Spirit empowers you to walk by keeping your eyes, heart and mind focused on Jesus. He gives you perseverance and even a joy

amidst the struggles of walking the way of the cross of Jesus on the basis of the promise Jesus gave in John 16:33 → *I have said these things to you, that **in Me** you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. **But take heart; I have overcome the world.*** Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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