

Sermon Title: Getting Behind Jesus Again  
Place & Date: St. Giles, Ottawa, February 25, 2024

## Prelude

## Welcome

—> Welcome to St. Giles Presbyterian Church  
 We are a caring community of faith in the heart of the Glebe.  
 We seek to share Christ's vision for the world  
 and respond in a Christ-like manner  
 to the present-day challenges.  
 My name is Paul Wu...minister...worship leader today

—> March 3, Annual Congregational Meeting

—> Territorial Acknowledgement

## Call to Worship

One: How shall we come before our God?

**All: We come to celebrate God's goodness and grace.**

One: As we serve, what does the Lord require of us?

**All: The Lord calls us to do justice and to love kindness.**

One: As we worship, what does the Lord require of us?

**All: The Lord calls us to walk and worship in humility**

One: Let us worship, love and serve each other  
 in the name of Christ. **Amen.**

Hymn 353 Hail, our once-rejected Jesus  
 (tune of Hyfrydol, #371)

## Children's Story

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### Prayer of Adoration

Faithful God,  
who fulfilled the promises made to the generations before us.  
Thank you for your faithfulness.  
May everyone tell of your goodness and your grace.  
Generous God,  
we praise you for gracious presence with us throughout the years  
and for sending Jesus Christ  
to deliver us from all manner of injustices and inequalities.  
Your glorious Spirit fills this world and renews our hearts and visions  
so that we can see your image in every person  
irrespective of background, race, and ethnicity.  
Your love moves beyond divides and borders  
and works in us to end misunderstanding, racism, and injustice;  
creating communities of human flourishing.  
We praise you for reconciling your world  
and making us one in Christ.

### Unison Prayer of Confession

**Forgiving God, we do not readily open our hearts to others  
who are different from us.  
We want to follow the example set by Jesus to love everyone,  
but we are scared of the unknown  
and scared that we might lose ourselves.  
We fail so often to share your unconditional love with others.  
Forgive us, Lord, and remind us  
of Jesus' sacrificial love for us and all humanity.  
Strengthen us where we are weak,  
that we may faithfully respond to your call  
to love one another as you have loved us.  
Make us channels of your peace and people,  
who will build your kingdom of love and justice.**

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### The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen**

### Assurance of Pardon

As descendants of Abraham  
we are called by God to bless all nations and all people.

Let us give God thanks  
for the salvation through the resurrection of Jesus  
that is free and available to all.

Go, live in peace,  
love the Lord, and love others. **Amen.**

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Scripture (Laura Brandon)

First Reading Genesis 17:1-7

—> Abram: exalted father, Abraham: father of multitude

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you and will make you exceedingly numerous.” Then Abram fell on his face, and God said to him, “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

Psalm 22: 23-31 (with refrain 1)

I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters;  
 in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.

**You who fear the Lord, praise God!**

**All you offspring of Jacob, glorify God;  
 stand in awe, all you offspring of Israel!**

For you Lord, did not despise or disdain  
 the affliction of the afflicted;

**You did not hide you face from me,  
 but heard me when I cried to you.**

From you comes my praise in the great congregation;  
 my vows I will pay before those who fear you.

**The poor shall eat and be satisfied;  
 those who seek the Lord shall praise the Lord.  
 May your hearts live forever!**

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All the ends of the earth shall remember  
and turn to the Lord;

**and all the families of the nations  
shall worship before you.**

For dominion belongs to the Lord,  
who rules over the nations.

**All who sleep in the earth  
shall bow down to the Lord.**

All who go down to the dust,  
Shall bow before the Lord.

And I shall live for God.

**Posterity shall serve the Lord;  
future generations will be told about the Lord,  
and proclaim deliverance to a people yet unborn,  
saying that God has done it.**

Second Reading Mark 8: 31-38

—> shortly after Peter declared Jesus to be the Messiah

Then he began to teach them 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. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

He called the crowd with his disciples and said to them, “If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

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Reader: This is the word of the Lord  
People: **Thanks be to God.**

Hymn 211 Take up your cross

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## Sermon

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts  
be acceptable to you. O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

I once came across a story, originally from S.I. McMillen  
in his book *None of These Diseases*, a classic in itself  
that outlines extraordinary medical benefits that are available  
to those who follow the Bible's teachings.

The story tells a young woman who wanted to go to college,  
but her heart sank when she read the question  
on the application form, asking, "Are you a leader?"  
Being brutally honest, she replied, "No,"  
and submitted the application,  
expecting the worst.

To her amazement,  
she received an acceptance letter from the college,  
with this opening paragraph: "Dear Applicant:  
A study of the application forms reveals that  
this year our college will have 1,452 new leaders.  
We are accepting you because we feel it is imperative  
that they have at least one follower."

To be a good leader, one must learn first to be a good follower.  
I've always subscribe to this tried and true wisdom  
of 'lead, follow, or get out of the way', a quote I had thought  
to be from General George S. Patton,  
but it might've been first uttered by Thomas Paine.

I do not think one needs to be ashamed to be called a follower.  
The key question for us to consider is:  
Who should we follow?  
Who is truly worthy of our followership?

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Brother and sisters in Christ, it is with that in mind,  
I like to invite you consider this Sunday's Lectionary reading  
of Mark 8:31-38.

I have to say that even after all these years,  
I am still somewhat taken aback  
by these words of Jesus, as recorded in Mark 8:33,  
where the Lord rebuked Peter, saying  
"Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind  
the concerns of God,  
but merely human concerns."

These words were uttered in the context  
soon after Peter had declared Jesus as Messiah, as Christ,  
which should really be considered as a  
personal triumph of the disciple's faith—  
after all this time of following Jesus,  
Peter finally gets it!

But no sooner had he got it, he lost it again,  
because Jesus began to teach openly,  
no longer in secret, hidden out of sight.

Jesus began to teach 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." (Mark 8:31)

I can totally understand Peter's reservation;  
I can almost see the shock look on his face, thinking...  
Why is Jesus saying all these things?

Is this really what I have, what we all have signed up for...  
following a leader who is openly talking about  
suffering, rejection, and being killed?



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And what is this mumble jumble about rising up again after three days?  
Even if we the 'die hearts' who have nowhere else to go,  
and are willing to stick around to the bitter end,  
who else would be crazy enough to follow someone  
who is predicting his own death,  
and resurrection?

These words can't be good for us,  
can't be good for the movement,  
can't be good for the cause.

So Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke the Lord.  
Oh, the irony of a disciple correcting his teacher,  
of a follower rebuking the leader.

But no sooner did Peter opened his mouth,  
Jesus turning and looking at his disciples,  
he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan!"

Get behind me, Satan! Harsh words for sure;  
words that could only be said between friends,  
between close friends.

But what is a friend?

A friend asks you to put on nothing,  
only to be what you are.  
You can say what you think to a friend,  
as long as it is genuinely you.  
You do not have to be careful around true friends.  
They understand. With them you breath freely.  
Best of all, you can keep still with them.  
It makes no matter. They like you.  
You can weep with them, sing with them,  
laugh with them, pray with them.  
Through it all—and underneath—  
they see, know and accept you.

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Aristotle, the Greek philosopher, defines friendship  
as 'a single soul dwelling in two bodies'....  
hmm...a single soul dwelling in two bodies.

Proverbs (18:24) teaches that  
"a man of many companions may come to ruin,  
but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother"  
...closer than a brother.

Nevertheless, it needs to said that Jesus is a better friend,  
for he turns the mind of Peter from human things  
to that of the divine.  
He invites Peter,  
to be mindful of the concerns of God.

Thou his words were harsh, calling out his close friend as 'Satan',  
Jesus proceeded to gather the crowd with the disciples  
and taught in verse 34, "If any wish to come after me,  
let them deny themselves  
and take up their cross and follow me."

And in verse 35, "For those who want to save their life will lose it,  
and those who lose their life for my sake,  
and for the sake of the gospel, will save it."

Sounds absurd, counter-intuitive, and illogical.  
However, what Jesus said should be understood  
as a paradoxical truth,  
and it actually has real-life applications,  
take for example, on a battlefield.

Both ancient and modern battle tactics stress moral.  
Moral is what is holding an army together,  
to stand one's ground, to fight to the end,  
for a hope of victory.

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Loosing moral is often detrimental,  
 as combatants, in fear of their own lives,  
 turn to flee the battlefield.  
 They become much more vulnerable  
 to be cut down by the enemies,  
 leading to a total rout.

As Tyrtaeus, the ancient Spartan poet, notes,  
 “The man who risks his life in battle  
 has the best chance of saving it;  
 the one who flees to save it  
 is the most likely to lose it.”

In the same way, Jesus is the commander of the army of God.  
 He is calling his disciples to follow,  
 marching onto the spiritual battlefield,  
 a battlefield of good vs. evil,  
 of righteousness vs. wickedness,  
 of love vs. hate,  
 for the sake of the Gospel,  
 the good news of the coming Kingdom of God.

In this spiritual battlefield, it is clear who is the leader,  
 and who are to follow. That is all of us are called to follow Jesus,  
 without looking back, without hesitating,  
 without giving a thought to the danger  
 that such following might pose to their lives.

And Jesus promises that those who do so  
 will, against all expectation, find life. (Pause)

A young man was coming out of a church one day,  
 and the preacher was standing by the door  
 as he always does to shake hands.

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He grabbed the young man by the hand and pulled him aside,  
and said to him, "You need to join the Army of the Lord  
The young man replied,  
"I'm already in the Army of the Lord, Pastor."

The pastor questioned further, "How come I don't see you much,  
except maybe at Christmas and Easter?"  
He whispered back, "I'm in the secret service."

Jesus said, "If any wish to come after me,  
let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."  
It is an invitation, not from a pastor,  
but from Christ himself, the Son of God.

Jesus does not rebuke Peter, and tells him to get out the way.  
Jesus invites him to fall back in line, to get behind and follow.

Following Jesus is not a wide road, but a narrow path.  
The way of Christ is not all smooth sailing,  
but requires some degrees of suffering.  
The goal is the cross,  
but that is not the final destination.

The cross may be seen by the world as a disgrace, a defeat,  
but to God, and to those whose eyes are open wide,  
it is the path to victory.

As the Apostle Paul states so proudly, in 1 Corinthians 1:18,  
"For the message of the cross is foolishness  
to those who are perishing,  
but to us who are being saved  
it is the power of God...."

(and to verse 25) For God's foolishness  
is wiser than human wisdom,  
and God's weakness is stronger than human strength."

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I will leave with you the story of Isaac Newton and Edmund Halley.  
Undoubtedly you are familiar with Newton's fame encounter  
with a falling apple, which inspired him  
to discover the laws of gravity in the 1600s.

But few know that if it weren't for Edmund Halley,  
the world might never have been introduced to Newton's idea.

For it was Halley who challenged Newton  
to think through his original notions.

It was Halley who corrected Newton's math,  
and encouraged Newton to back up his ideas  
with geometrical figures to support his discoveries.

It was Halley who urged the hesitant Newton  
to eventually publish his monumental work,  
*Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*.

It was Halley who supervised, edited the publication,  
and actually financed its printing,  
even though Newton was wealthier and could have  
easily afforded the printing costs.

Historians consider this one of the most  
selfless examples in the field of science.  
Newton would go on to reap the benefit of prominence,  
whereas Halley received little credit.

He did use the same principles to predict the orbit of a comet  
that would later bear his name, but only after his death.  
Throughout his life, Halley remained a devoted scientist  
who didn't care about getting the credit  
as long as the cause was being advanced.  
A follower or a leader? Who is to say?

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Many have played Halley's role in advancing the Kingdom of God.

Peter did fall behind Jesus, and dutifully followed.

In time, he would rise in prominence  
and became a leader in his own right,  
for the early church.

Peter would eventually, literally and figuratively 'take up his own cross'  
and paid with his own life.

But others, many others would soon follow,  
in the footsteps of Jesus,  
taking up also their own cross,  
to further the coming Kingdom.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

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### Prayers of the People (O Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer**)

(Every February, people across Canada participate in Black History Month events and festivities that honour the legacy of Black people in Canada and their communities. This following prayer is written with that in mind.)

God of grace and mercy, we come as a broken and sinful people before your throne thanking you for your grace.  
There is so much for people of African descent to fear as we live in these days.  
The trauma of the transatlantic slave trade is still vivid in many contexts across the world.

O Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer**

The legacy of slavery still exists in many ways and systems here in North America.  
We pray that we will be bold enough to speak out against oppression as we seek to reflect your glory.  
May we, enlightened by the light of Christ, rebuke the tyranny and lies of racism and white supremacy.

O Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer**

Lord there are many who are downtrodden by inequality and injustice.  
In your mercy hear our prayer:  
we pray for a better society for all people where dividing walls are broken down giving way to the redeeming love of Jesus Christ.  
May the choices we make help to liberate all people, especially those who have been marginalized, and who are held captive by inequality and injustice.

O Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer**

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Lord, we bring before you people throughout the world who struggle with poverty, food insecurity, lack of clean water and proper resources to aid their survival.

We lift up people who are displaced and those who must migrate in and from places like South Sudan, Central America, and other places where the most vulnerable are being exploited and enslaved.

O Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer**

Emmanuel, God with us,  
move through communities across the world where Black people struggle to find hope because of years of colonialism and cause your hope to find the depths of each heart.  
Lord every life matters so may we end the actions that reflect the erroneous belief that some lives matter more than others.

O Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer**

God of the Universe, we bring ourselves to your throne of grace.  
We are all facing different situations as we grapple with changing times, but you are aware of who we are, and what we are going through.  
Activate your hope within us so that we may rely on the strength and comfort you offer.  
Have mercy on us, O God.  
Help us to regard all persons as made in your image.  
We ask all this in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Hymn 671            I heard the voice of Jesus say

Passing of the Peace

Announcements



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### Offering (invitation)

God has blessed us in so many ways  
and everything we need come from the Lord.  
We have been made to thrive and live in abundance.

We have the power to make a difference  
by giving to the life changing work  
of sharing the gospel of grace.

Come now, let us offer our gifts, our love; our everything  
on the altar as the Lord will bless, keep, and shape us.

### Doxology (Hymn 830)

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow,  
Praise him, all creatures here below;  
Praise him above, ye heavenly host;  
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.**

### Prayer of Dedication

Generous God, you have blessed our lives  
with many diverse gifts and peoples.  
We pause with grateful hearts to  
offer you gifts of money that you have provided for us.  
We also give to you our hands, our feet,  
our voices, our time, and our abilities.  
Use all that we are along with these gifts  
to spread your love throughout the world.  
We dedicate ourselves and all that we are to your work.  
We pray this in the name of Jesus. **Amen.**

Hymn 646      Lead me, Jesus; I will follow (x2)

Benediction / Postlude