



**THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT**  
**MARCH 17, 2019**  
**PHILIPPIANS 3:17-4:1**  
**“CARRYING THE WEIGHT”**

Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

- I imagine all of us are aware we are living in a confusing, chaotic, and anxious time.
- If you follow the news, Venezuela looks like a Post-Apocalyptic, science fiction movie. Purportedly, the average citizen has lost nineteen pounds due to the lack of food.
- Throughout the world, immigrants flee their homeland to find anything better than what they are living through in their homeland. Across the globe, the nations they enter are stressed socially and economically.
- Can you imagine leaving everything behind in Pittsburgh for, say Peru, on the outside chance that life might be better?
- In the U.S., our suicide rate soars, violence against loved ones is in the news everyday, we remain tensed for the next active shooter, and addiction kills more people than cancer, heart disease, and diabetes combined. For perhaps the first time, younger generations have less hope, more debt, and a bleaker future than previous generations.
- The soul doctor, Carl Jung, predicted all this seventy years ago.
- Jung saw that Christian faith was losing its grasp on people of the western world and that, as this loss of faith increased, chaos and confusion would reach epidemic proportions.

- Jung referenced the poem “The Second Coming” by William Butler Yeats, written after World War I:

“Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.  
Surely some revelation is at hand;  
Surely the second coming is at hand.”

- When the center does not hold and life-giving faith is lost, we become vulnerable to “isms”: nationalism, socialism, neo-nazism, fascism, hedonism, materialism.
- And that, indeed, is what we are experiencing.
- When the center gives way, we get extremes. Neo-nazis are given a voice in the public debate, as if the holocaust did not occur. Without a center, a spiritually impaired man murders forty-nine devout Muslims because he thinks they threaten his way of life, which must actually be a way of death.
- On the other hand, a socialist voice arises that doesn’t seem unaware of socialist failures throughout history. From France to Venezuela, from West Germany to Chile, socialism has left countries worse off than before socialists came to power. One may only ask why Haitian refugees travel 500 miles over the sea to the united states rather than the 50 miles to Cuba.
- In all of this chaos and confusion, where is accommodation? Compromise? Rational discussion or reasonable debate? Civility in the public arena has fallen by the wayside. Politics have deteriorated to name-calling and personal assassination. Where is a centrist position, despite surveys showing that most of us yearn for a centrist position; a perspective that combines both vision and common sense.
- Jung argued that, in this historical situation, we need genuine and grounding religion and spirituality or we are lost.

- What we need is a larger story that makes sense of and anchors us in our personal stories.
- Without a larger story to hold us spiritually and soulfully, our personal stories become meaningless—just one foot in front of the other from birth to death—falling into depression, anxiety, despair, addiction, and the aforementioned vulnerability to “isms”.
- So, let’s dig into Paul’s letter to the church at Philippi. Paul writes: “Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me. Observe those who live according to the example you have in us. For many live as the enemies of Christ.”
- The discipline of imitation or following is central to the gospel pattern.
- And what are we following or imitating?
- The pattern of the life of Christ.
- We carry the cross of our own life as faithfully as Jesus and Paul carried theirs.
- The season of lent has come around again and we are reminded that suffering is the way of the world. I feel it every day. Don’t you? The weight of the times in which we live.
- The root meaning of suffering has to do with weight. Our crosses are heavy. They weigh us down. It takes energy to carry them every day. If we put them down, it is only for a brief respite.
- Again, Jung speaks of the burden of consciousness—the weight of staying aware of and consciously carrying our crosses.
- All the “isms” are, in one sense, ways to try to escape the reality of our crosses. If we just elect this person, everything will be made right. How’s that working?
- But it’s not as if the next person won’t create other messes....
- I just read about a highly endorsed system of dealing with classroom behavioral problems in California. They have been using interventions instead of discipline. Everyone thought it would be marvelous. The next great thing! Instead, without consequences for bad

behavior, the schools are in absolute chaos. Between students and students. Between teachers and students. Between parents and teachers. In elementary school!

- When Paul writes about “enemies of Christ,” he is speaking of people who don’t get it.
- Or, we could put it this way: if you understand the Christian understanding of sin, you’re amazed that anything works.
- All the systems, all the institutions are broken. There is a fault line running through them all. There will be messiah in the political arena. There is no “ism” that will solve the world’s ills....
- Instead, part of the weight of our time is that, through social media, we are increasingly aware of all the world’s ills: every little disaster, tragedy, faultline, catastrophe, accident, and heartbreak.
- And it appears to be breaking us....
- Marie-lousie von Franz, a Jungian analyst who lived outside Zurich, chose not to pay attention to the news in order to protect the serenity of her soul.
- She spent her life remaining highly aware of her inner life while refusing to pay attention to the world’s craziness....
- In such times as ours, we must deeply root our personal life stories—our crosses—upon the reality of the cross of Christ.
- Paul is saying is that the danger is narrowing life to the moment to moment—day to day—basics of life. Focusing on how many likes you received on your photo of yesterday’s lunch....
- Even worse, we are in a superficial, hypersensitized, traumatized psychological state as a country and world.
- I’m sorry, but a photo in the post-gazette of pitt students, sitting in a circle petting the dog to relieve stress because of midterms, just seemed so sad.

- Are young adults so fragile that six young adult students need to take turns petting a dog? If you can't handle taking a test and then having the rest of the day to drink beer and raise hell, what are you going to do when you have to work fifty hours a week in the workplace? With no dogs!
- We are so hypervigilant and that half the time i don't know what pronoun to use or what to call members of various cultural factions.
- When the world goes mad, the instinct is to make our worlds smaller and smaller in order to preserve some sense of well-being.
- Isn't this what Paul means when he speaks of "those whose destruction is in their bellies?" Life reduced to "what's for dinner." Life reduced to the "all-you-can-eat-buffet" while watching starving children on the big screen tv....
- God's pattern is counter-intuitive. We lean into the pain and the trauma.
- We connect our pain and trauma to the pain and trauma around us, all held within the pain and trauma of the cross of Christ.
- Our personal stories connected to the larger story.
- Betrayal is central to the larger story. "in the night in which he was betrayed."
- When was the night in which you were betrayed?
- Just one of my nights of betrayal was when my father first attempted suicide.
- When did life betray you?
- Your parent's divorce? Not finding meaningful work? Betrayal by a spouse? Life not turning out how you thought it would? The mess our country is in? A god who doesn't turn out to be who you were told god would be?
- Most likely, if you don't connect your personal story of betrayal with the larger story of betrayal, you might end up resentful, angry, depressed, or cynical.

- Connected to the larger story, the message of betrayal is god's path to finding your way to your true self, as Jesus did.
- But this experience is part of your cross.
- Betrayal leads to suffering, which entails all kind of conflict.
- How did we get from bearing our crosses and the necessity of creative conflict in life to defining a Christian as someone who is nice?
- Suffering and conflict are not nice and they don't lead to niceness. From the cross, Jesus didn't comment, "it looks nice from up here."
- If you want nice, go to a Ladies' Tea in Sewickley....
- Paul writes about Christ transforming the body of our humiliation.
- In psychology language, we call that "eating our shame."
- Again, God's pattern is counterintuitive. We want to hide from our shame. Pretend it didn't happen. And then remain in a constant state of feeling bad about ourselves.
- What God says is "Let's take your worst moments of failure, public embarrassment, and humiliation and turn them into creative and empowering wounds."
- Rather than casting your eyes to the ground, stand firm in Christ and acknowledge your broken, but blessed humanity.
- Who is more shamed than Jesus nailed naked on a cross on the garbage dump outside Jerusalem?
- Shame means we failed at being who others wanted us to be and we failed at being who we wanted to be.
- My father wanted me to be a banker. I wanted to be a rock and roller.
- I turned out to be a Pastor and Psychotherapist.

- God knew better than everyone, but it all has to do with my shame, betrayal, suffering, carrying the weight of my cross, and being connected to the larger story of the cross of Christ....
- The larger story is that we are loved and we're going to get smashed. To live as Christians, we carry the weight of this truth.
- The bad news is that suffering is the way of the world. The good news is that suffering is transformative. We carry the weight of this truth.
- The bad news is that the world has gone mad. The good news is that, as people of faith, we can remain sane and care for those caught up in the madness. We carry the weight of this truth.
- We are meant to be transformed in the mystery of it all—because ultimately, it is mystery.
- **The mystery of how betrayal, suffering, dying, spending time in the tomb, leads to rising to a new life in this lifetime, not just in the next.**
- This is your story and your cross foundationally connected to the larger story and the cross of Christ.
- In this faith community, god carries our weight as we carry our weight together.
- SERMON SONG: **THE WEIGHT** BY THE BAND