

First Presbyterian Church  
Cheyenne, Wyoming  
October 18, 2009  
Rev. Bob Garrard

Worship Theme: Jesus' Warning Label,  
Psalm 104: 1-9, 24, 35c Hebrews 5: 1-10, Mark 10: 32-45

Protective warning labels have become a vital necessity in this world especially with all the new chemicals and products developed over the last 150 years. We do need some instructions to keep us from harm and save our lives. However, there are some warning labels that make me wonder if common sense has become an "endangered species." Here are a few that fit that category: *A car manual reads: "In order to get out of car, open door, get out, lock doors, and then close doors."* *On a cardboard sunshield that keeps the sun off the dashboard: "Do not drive with sunshield in place."* *On a Holmes bathroom heater: "This product is not to be used in bathrooms."* *On a birthday card for a 1 year old: "Not suitable for children aged 36 months or less."* *On a shipment of hammers: "May be harmful if swallowed."* *From a manual for an SGI computer: Do not dangle the mouse by its cable or throw the mouse at co-workers."* Takes all the fun out of office work.

The disconnect from logic and logical consequences implied in these warning labels is nothing new. In the passage from Mark, we heard Jesus express a very clear warning label. "Very soon I will be arrested, beaten, killed and then on the third day, raised from the dead." For the good of the disciples, Jesus was warning them of what was to come. Mark does not say this, but I suspect there was some stunned silence as the twelve men tried to wrap their minds around what they thought they had just heard. But instead of protests over what Jesus said was going to happen to him, or any supportive words like, "we will go through this with you," James and his brother, John responded: "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." WHAT! This illogical and insensitive response would be comparable to us saying, "Oh by the way Jesus as you carry the cross up the road to Golgotha could you pick up a loaf of bread, gallon of milk and a dozen eggs and drop it off at our house. You will be going by the store and the house anyway." Sometimes people can be this way with their prayers or attitudes in the worship of our Lord. "I understand you suffered greatly for my sins Lord, and that being raised from the dead was a pretty neat stunt, but I have this shopping list of things you need to do for me so my life is more comfortable. And by the way, could you get that minister up front to make the worship services more entertaining and make sure he keeps them short, not a second over sixty minutes long. We do not believe we should suffer any more than we have to, you do understand, Jesus." Oh, he does understand.

As we heard in the reading from Hebrews, Jesus, having been appointed by God, to be the high priest to intervene with God on our behalf for the sins we have committed, lived among us and understood us. He "was able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward." And in this manner he dealt with James and John. Instead of blowing his top or just walking away, Jesus went with the flow and asked them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" What a beautiful example of active listening

and setting aside of one's self for others this was. I pray Jesus helps me to be better at this and be as sensitive as he was when such occasions arise. However, James and John, seemingly oblivious to their own insensitivity to what Jesus was going to suffer for them, "said to him, 'Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.'" "They didn't just want to bask in God's glory. Their requests to Jesus 'to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory' were requests to share in the administration and use of this divine power and ability to impose their will on others. Why, they were already trying it out on Jesus. Did you notice how they asked for Jesus' acquiescence even before spelling out the details? "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." But then, given the nature of what it was that they wanted, who could blame them for trying to secure Jesus' agreement even before coming right out and asking for it!" People can sometimes be very sneaky trying to get their way. To add to this mess, upon hearing James' and John's "request" the other disciples became jealous over it and angry with them. What a mess the misuse of power, position and jealousy can create. But blessed Jesus, having been appointed by God to be the high priest to intervene with God on our behalf for the sins we commit, still lives among us and understands us, even when we are insensitive to all he has done and is still doing for us. He let the disciples know he does not decide these things, but God does. God decides who is worthy of positions of power and authority, and God cannot be manipulated. "Emphasis," 10/18/09

Jesus continued to speak and calmly brought the disciples and any of us who follow him back to reality with a warning label that read: "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" "The cup represents the blood Jesus will shed to establish the new covenant." It is the same cup and new covenant we refer to in communion. Also, remember how Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane to be spared the cup of God's wrath for our sins? Were the disciples, and are we willing and able to drink from such a cup as disciples of Jesus Christ? The baptism is also a metaphor for death. As we heard in our baptism litany, when we baptized Caitlin Marie Jessen today, in baptism we are united with Jesus Christ in his death and fortunately in his resurrection. The disciples said they would drink of the cup and suffer the same baptism Christ did. Most of them indeed eventually suffered and died for God in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ made clear the cost of discipleship in his warning label. TNIBC, Vol. VIII, pg. 653.

We may ask, "Do we have to literally die for Jesus Christ to be good Christians?" No, martyrdom is not a requirement, thank God, but dying to ourselves and living for God as Jesus Christ did is. This is what confessing Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior and being baptized means. In his warning label, Jesus lived and clearly described this dying to one's self and living for God to the disciples and to us. "So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as ransom for many." Jesus set the pattern we are to follow. In his warning label he spelled it out

very clearly. “If you are going to follow me, this you must do to lose your life in order to save it.”

I like how Rev. Timothy Cargal describes this true following of Jesus: “A real Christian is an odd number. He or she feels love for one whom they have never seen; talks with familiarity to someone they cannot see; expects to go to heaven on the virtue of another; empties themselves in order to be full; admits he or she is wrong so they can be declared right; goes down in order to get up; is strongest when he or she is weakest; richest when he or she is poorest; and happiest when he or she feels the worst. He or she dies so they can live, forsakes in order to have; gives away so they can keep; sees the invisible, hears the inaudible, and knows that which passes knowledge.” “Emphasis,” 10/18/09

I have seen many of you live out or follow Jesus’ warning label. I have seen you drink of the cup and go through the baptism as you have had to make some very difficult decisions about the well being, even the life and death of family members. You have wondered what would Jesus do and would have you do. In a way, part of you died in the process and I have seen God give you new life to carry on in this world. A divorce can take a person on the same journey. I have seen you die to self and live for Christ in your service as elders, deacons, church school teachers, staff and ministry members. Hard decisions have been made, hundreds of hours have been given, sleep has been lost, yet you have stayed faithful to the Lord and the church. You have prayed to Jesus “who has offered up prayers and supplications on our behalf, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.” Hundreds of thousands of hard earned dollars have been so generously given in Christ’s name to carry on his mission to redeem us and the world God so wondrously created as we heard read in the psalm. You have lived out or followed Jesus’ warning label—drank of the cup and suffered the baptism because you believe he is “the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.”

Today, I lift up Clint and Jessica Jessen as examples in our church of taking Jesus’ warning label seriously. They got up early to ready three children, drove 50 miles-one way—would have done so even in the meanest of weather—to have their precious daughter claimed by God, sealed to God to show that she belongs to God, and have her sins washed away by Christ in the sacrament of baptism. They do this many other Sundays and on certain days of the month for MOPS, the session and for the Finance and Christian Education Ministries. This is not to mention the faith it takes to be organic wheat farmers in Southeastern Wyoming, Thank you.

I think our middle hymn for today is an excellent summary of the warning label Jesus’ placed before the disciples then and before those of us today. It is, “Take Up the Cross, the Savior Said,” written by Charles William Everest, an Episcopal priest in 1833.

1. Take up your cross, the Savior said, If you would My disciple be; Take up your cross with willing heart, And humbly follow after Me.
2. Take up your cross, let not its weight    Fill your weak spirit with alarm;  
Christ’s strength shall bear your spirit up    And brace your heart and nerve your arm.

3. Take up your cross, heed not the shame, And let your foolish heart be still;  
The Lord for you accepted death Upon a cross, on Calvary's hill.
4. Take up your cross, then, in Christ's strength, And calmly every danger brave:  
It guides you to abundant life And leads to victory o'er the grave.

Praise be to the Christ who is our high priest and “source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.” .