

Lent 2B  
Peace, Seattle  
February 25, 2018  
Mark 8:31-38

## **FOLLOWING THE CHRIST OF BOJAYÁ**

**It's called the Christ of Bojayá**—a mutilated Jesus without arms or legs that hangs on the cross in the village church of Bojayá along Columbia's Pacific Coast. It has become an infamous emblem of the cost of war.<sup>1</sup>

On May 2, 2002, as the decades old battle between revolutionary guerrilla forces (FARC) and right-wing paramilitary fighters raged near Bojayá, a mortar round fired by the guerrillas landed on the church where hundreds of townspeople had sought shelter. The blast killed 119 people, over half of them children, and wounded 89 who had been seeking shelter inside the building.<sup>2</sup>

The explosion also blew away the arms and the legs of the church's crucifix, leaving only the head and torso. This maimed Christ hanging on the cross became a national symbol after the massacre.

During Columbia's long civil war the region around Bojayá was perhaps the most abandoned and most suffering region in the entire country—contested territory among armed groups—each of which vied for access to its resources and for control of the drug and weapons trades.

When, after 13 years of waiting, the case of the Bojayá massacre finally reached Columbian courts in 2015, representatives from the Lutheran World Federation's (LWF) Colombia program and its Roman Catholic partner, Caritas Colombia, jointly accompanied the victims through the court case.<sup>3</sup>

During the peace negotiations between revolutionary forces (FARC) and the Colombian government that same year, FARC guerrillas went to the community of Bojayá to ask the people for forgiveness. In order to embrace peace, community leaders said, the people have had to forgive not just the FARC, but the government, as well.<sup>4</sup> In the national referendum on peace, 96% of the people of Bojayá voted in favor of making peace

Though the first peace accord was narrowly rejected nationally, a negotiated accord was finally signed in November of 2016.

**Last September, on his visit to Columbia, Pope Francis prayed before the Christ of Bojayá.** Then, during a Vatican meeting with a Lutheran World Federation delegation in December, Francis was presented with a replica of the mutilated crucifix by LWF's General Secretary Martin Junge.

"Looking at the wounded Christ," Junge told Francis, "we are drawn into God's reconciling presence that heals our wounded world and calls the church into unity."

It is the same wounded Christ who calls to us from today's gospel, to take up the cross and follow him. But who wants to go there? Who wants to be reminded of the Christ of Bojayá? To suffer with the victims—to become a victim oneself?

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<sup>1</sup> The Lutheran World Federation. <https://www.lutheranworld.org/news/his-bruises-we-are-healed>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, plus New York Times. Casualty figures from these two sources differ. The figures from the LWF Article are included here. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/11/world/americas/colombia-peace-deal.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.lutheranworld.org/news/together-peace>

<sup>4</sup> New York Times, op cit.

“The Son of Man,” Jesus told his disciples, “must undergo great suffering and be killed, and after three days rise again.” And he said all this quite openly.

But Peter, who moments before had confessed Jesus as MESSIAH, can’t wrap his mind around such nonsense. So he confronts Jesus, and in the process finds himself roundly rebuked.

GET BEHIND ME, SATAN, says Jesus, YOU HAVE NO CLUE WHAT GOD IS UP TO.

Then, turning to the crowd, Jesus says: IF ANY WANT TO FOLLOW ME LET THEM DENY THEMSELVES, TAKE UP THEIR CROSS, AND FOLLOW.

No doubt there were some in that crowd who were following Jesus precisely because they thought that by doing so they would improve their prospects; that their lives would become more successful, more fulfilling; that they would in some sense be safer.

Mark doesn’t say it, but it wouldn’t surprise me if, after news of this confrontation got around, the crowds around Jesus began to get thinner.

We are, after all, self-preservationists. It’s how we’re built. Who wants to sign up for suffering? Who wants to line up behind a mutilated Christ? When things start to fall apart, instinct takes over, and I do whatever I need to do to protect myself, right?

But if what Jesus says is true, then when we dedicate ourselves to preserving our lives we run the risk of losing something even more precious.

Of course, the fact that we, like Peter, cannot be other than our self-preservationist-selves is precisely why “it is necessary that the Son of Man undergo great suffering, be rejected and killed, and after three days rise.” **The only Jesus who can save us is a suffering Jesus, a maimed Jesus.**

One week after 17 peers and adults were murdered at their school, students from Stoneman Douglas High in Parkland, Florida, rallied at their state capitol to demand action from Florida lawmakers.

**I can imagine the people of Bojayá, with their armless and legless Jesus, joining that march.**

The powerful, broken voices of these young people, striving to reach the consciences of elected leaders who have failed at their most fundamental responsibility—to ensure the protection of children—these voices should haunt us, every one.

One of the funerals held last week was for Peter Wang, age 15, who, according to witnesses, was killed while holding the door open so others could escape. His parents say their son always felt a responsibility to look out for others. Now they’re stuck in an unbearable nightmare.<sup>5</sup>

It’s not the children Jesus is addressing when he says, TAKE UP YOUR CROSS AND FOLLOW ME. Yet it is children across the nation—along with their teachers and staff—who have become the targets of assault weapons, while lawmakers charged with the responsibility for their protection sit on their hands and do nothing.

And while our sympathy for these young people, their teachers and families, our solidarity, our prayers, are important, we fall abysmally short of the mark if that is ALL we offer.

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<sup>5</sup> NPR <http://kcur.org/post/students-marjory-stoneman-douglas-high-school-rallying-gun-control-tallahassee#stream/0>

The irrational violence that saw Jesus crucified, that stole the lives of the 119 children, women and men who huddled in that Columbian church, and blew away the arms and legs of the Christ figure,<sup>6</sup> is the same persistent and irrational violence that took 17 lives at Stoneman Douglas High School, and at Sandy Hook, and at Columbine, and at dozens and dozens of other schools over the past 20 years.

**How can we escape from this wilderness?**

Truth be told, there can be no exit from this wilderness as long as laws remain unchanged. And we can be assured that laws will not change as long as the deep pocketed interests exert more leverage on lawmakers than the citizens of this republic.

So I am encouraged when I see these young citizens— and others with them—telling the truth, going public with their demands, and refusing to accept the status quo as normative.

Friends, what is our role, our calling in this crisis, as members of the body of Christ?

**We take our cue from the Christ of Bojayá.** Crucifixion & resurrection meet in this maimed crucifix. Despair and hope, irrational violence and unbroken love, the power of evil and the resilience of good, all are represented here—almost touching each other.<sup>7</sup>

Look at this Christ!—his arms and legs may be gone, but his heart and head remain.

And that heart—unbroken and beating for justice, compassion and solidarity—  
and that mind—creatively envisioning the world as God wants it to be—  
are looking for arms and hands and legs that will continue reaching and touching and bringing God's embrace to this world.

**Sisters and brothers, is not this our calling? To be those arms & hands, those legs & feet...**

- Locking arms with others for change; voting with our feet;
- reaching out to all who feel invisible or who have succumbed to the great LIE that meting out violence will put an end to problems.

These are actions from which we should never shrink; about which we should never be ashamed.  
For through these actions, we witness to the marked and wounded body of Christ in the world.<sup>8</sup>

**The powers-that-be crucified Jesus in order to silence him; but in the wake of his empty tomb, that silence could not hold. We cannot let silence hold for us.**

When Jesus calls to us: FOLLOW ME, what he's really doing is calling us back to our deepest selves.

He's calling us to live the indelible identity that is his gift to us in baptism; an identity that grows stronger through suffering rather than weaker; an identity that links us with all victims of violence and pledges itself to a future where young and old can learn and live without fear; an identity that nothing and no one can take away.

When we meet Christ at this Table, we not only eat and drink forgiveness; we become, through his gifts, his arms and legs, his hands and feet, his body for the sake of the world. May it be so.

Amen.

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<sup>6</sup> Martin Junge. <https://www.lutheranworld.org/news/gods-compassionate-embrace>

<sup>7</sup> Martin Junge. <https://www.lutheranworld.org/news/gods-compassionate-embrace>

<sup>8</sup> *One Hope: Re-membering the Body of Christ*. p. 3