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“Dylan, Eeyore, and Honesty of Jesus” The Rev. Aaron M. G. Zimmerman
(02/25/2024, Second Sunday in Lent)

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Let us pray, Almighty God made the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be always acceptable in desight, O Lord our strength and our Redeemer. Amen. I'm sure many of you know that in the 1980s Bob Dylan had a powerful conversion experience. It became a born again Christian and released three incredible explicitly Christian albums. The fans hated it but I think the body of work actually stands on its own and has stood the test of time. You got to serve somebody, slow train coming, a lot of it is pretty amazing work but what was interesting about that conversion experience, Bob Dylan was normally Jewish, raised in Minnesota, has spent time in Greenwich Village. He was totally new to this Christian community in California at that time in his life and one of the members of that Christian community was an artist named Keith Green who recorded many many albums, an incredible pianist, singer, composer, sort of the Christian version of Jackson Brown and Elton John and Billy Joel all rolled into one. He lived in Tyler for a long time and sadly died in a plane crash in the 70s but Keith Green was an Israelite in whom there was no guy. I mean he was the real deal. He loved the Lord Jesus and wanted everybody to love Jesus as much as he did and so Bob Dylan became a Christian and

began
going to these church services and hanging out with all these folks
like Keith
Green and Keith saw Bob at one of these events and there was something
that Bob
was doing, some area of his life that Keith Green thought he needed
to, the Bob
needed a shape up, needed a repent or turn around or something and I
don't know
if you've ever felt compelled to give someone advice about their life
but
that's what Keith Green felt like he needed to do and he told Bob
whatever he
needed to tell him and we know about this because Keith Green went
home and on
reflection repented of that and said in his journal, I tried to be the
Holy
Spirit to Bob Dylan today. This to me is maybe a little bit like what
Peter
tried to do with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who is talking to
his disciples
and speaking to them about his ministry and Peter pulls Jesus aside to
say
no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, but I get it because
Jesus's
comments are very ear, you know, ear is always like, well nobody ever
wants to
visit me anyways. I'll just eat this thistle like he's a total downer
and
that's kind of what Jesus is doing here in this story right before
this Jesus has
asked the famous question but who do you say that I am and Peter's
like, you're
the Messiah the Christ and Jesus as bingo give this man a prize the
Holy Spirit has
revealed this to you to thumbs up and then but I'm gonna suffer and
all the elders
will reject me and then I'm gonna die. It goes from this mountaintop
to this ear
moment and Peter's like, no, no, no, no, no, no, Lord, let's stay up on
the mountaintop.
Let's go for glory. You got all these magical powers. It'll be great.
We'll rule
Israel. Do what King David could never do. Hold the kingdom together.
Be the
best. And so Peter says, no, Jesus, you're not gonna lose. You're a
winner. We love
winners. We love to brag about winning. I remember when Donald Trump
said in his
first campaign, I'm gonna win so much he'll get tired of winning and

he was like, yeah!

And people, people got nervous when I just mentioned that. Oh, is he gonna get political? No, I'm just saying, people like winners. Look at the entire catalog of hip-hop from its 50 years ago beginning till today. There's a whole subsection of that where rappers boast about being better than other rappers, wherever they're from. It's a huge thing. I'm the best. All those wack MCs, as Missy Elliott calls them, need to just step off. You're welcome. We like winners. We like to be winners. And Peter thinks Jesus is a winner. He's hitched his wagon to this whole Jesus project. He's left everything behind all of them. He left everything behind to follow Jesus. And he's like, by the way, thanks for signing up for my little mission. I'm gonna die. It will fail. And so of course, Peter says, you're on the wrong track. Not a great motivational speaker, the Lord. But Jesus is doing something in the way that he typically does, which is he's so, he runs counter to everything we think about how the world works and what life is about. Life really means. Everybody tells you you need to be a winner. Be all you can be. Grab all that you can. Look out for number one. Achieve, build, succeed. More, better, faster. You know, Peter Gabriel, that song big, you know, everything needs to be bigger and better. And Jesus says that life, a real life, a life of meaning, a life of wholeness, a life of integrity, a life of joy, a life where God is at the center, does not look like that. It looks like dying. If you go to Barnes & Noble, you'll find a great section on self-improvement. But I've checked, there is no self-negation section. But that is what Jesus is offering. Now, there's not to say you're terrible or you need to feel bad about yourself, but what Jesus is saying is that the ego is full of illusion and lies. And it will lead you to all kinds of toxic paths of competition in your relationships, judgment of others, contempt towards people who don't do as well as you. If you live by that, you will be crushed by it. The never-ending demand to succeed, to be the best, to win at all costs at all times. You'll either succeed and think you're better than other people or

fail and deal with
all the psychological and emotional impacts of that. You'll feel very
alone. And Jesus
is inviting and leading the way, actually, to say that true life is
not gained through
achievement and domination. But through a letting go, to resigning, to
giving up, laying down
your life and your whole self-improvement project, which is a little
bit what Lent is about,
to lean into that reality. Now, you may say, okay, well, how do I do
this? How do I achieve
this spiritual enlightenment you're talking about through self-
negation? Well, I have two
things to say about that. And then I will land this plane. The first
is that life will do a
lot of it for you. Richard Wors says that God comes to you disguised
as your life. And oftentimes,
the places that are hard and difficult and dark in life are the places
where God is actually
working. I think about St. Paul, praying that God would remove this
thorn from his side. And
God's saying, no, because my strength has made perfect in your
weakness. My grace is sufficient
for you. You never find that out if you win all the time. You only
need grace if you're a sinner.
You only need help if you fall. You only need rescue if you're
drowning. And that's where you begin
to learn who you really are, who God really is. God comes to you
disguised as your life. The other
thing I will say about how this looks in one's life is to put yourself
in places that remind you of
reality. Run as far as you can from things that are false and tell you
lies. Like every TV
commercial you've ever seen. New and improved. This thing, have you
ever seen ads for cosmetics?
Like oil of O.A. Like you put this stuff on, it'll change your life
forever. The commercials,
at some point Garrett will have to begin coloring his beard. And he'll
watch his commercials where a man
in his early fifties is coloring his beard and he's sad and it's black
and white and then he
colors and he goes outside and everything is colorful and people look
at him. Those are all lies.
Those are all lies. And instead of being in worlds that tell you lies,
come to places that tell you
the truth. And the truth, this is one. This is a place. There are
other places. Church basements with
bad coffee and chain smokers outside by which I mean 12 step meetings.
Those are other places that
tell the truth. Maybe a small group Bible studies a place that tells

you the truth. Maybe you have a close friend or family member that tells you the truth. But be in places that remind you of the truth. The truth that Jesus says, that if you lose your life you will actually find it. If you try to gain your life, if you go after all the shiny things, you will actually come up empty. But if you lose your life, if you shop at the self negation section, you will actually find joy and peace. Because Jesus gives himself up to death on a cross and that's where he is to be found. And if you are in that place and coming into contact regularly to a place of that level of reality, you will find God. And in that place you will find rest for your souls. Let us pray. Almighty God, we desperately need rest and we ask that you set us free from striving and winning and bring us to places of honest losing and dying that we may rise again with you. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.