Yesterday morning as I was eating breakfast, there were a number of 9/11 tributes that were on several different channels. And I ended up watching one in particular, a kind of documentary that focused on Flight 93. To refresh your memory that was the plane that was headed they think to hit the capitol building in Washington D.C., but several passengers stormed the cockpit and the plane crashed in a field somewhere in Pennsylvania, killing everyone on board.

There was one interview that really brought home, the core of what our Gospel lesson is about today. A mother and a father, who had lost their daughter on Flight 93 were being interview. And they were speaking about a conversation they had together, when they first heard the news that two commercial flights out of New York had hit the Twin Towers and another had hit the Pentagon. Well, they knew that their daughter had been flying out of New York on that morning. And as the mother is interviewed, she describes a conversation that she had with her husband upon hearing the news. She said, “My husband looked over at me and said, I wonder if our daughter is on one of those planes?” And her reply was this, “Shut up, don’t even think like that.”

Maybe this has happened to you. Or maybe you’ve done this to someone else. It’s a very common approach to life isn’t it? To silence what is perceived as negativity. To not allow negative possibilities. The thinking I think is somewhat superstitious. As if thinking negative thoughts brings about negative results. Thinking positively brings about positive results. As if we are in control of how life goes for us. And it leads people to believe that the bad things that happen to people are the result of negative thinking. The husbands thoughts were absolutely true. His daughter was on one of those planes. But he was silenced from even considering the truth as a possibility. We are so determined to be upbeat.

Now there is a small way I think in which it is true that positive thinking brings about positive results, and negative thinking brings about negative results. You’ll get much farther with people by being positive than by being negative. There is an area of life in which that works in our daily interactions.

But it doesn’t work so well in other areas of life, and especially if you are trying to seek the truth. Elevated beyond its proper place, positive thinking begins to wall out the truth. Suddenly you begin to find a people who seem to believe that “it can’t happen here”. Or it can’t happen to me. And so you are unprepared for reality. One of the reasons 9/11 happened was because deep down we thought that kind of thing can’t happen here. That happens in other places but it can’t happen here. Our positivity and optimism got in the way of many negative messages that warned us of exactly of what was planned. Didn’t want to hear it I guess. That was costly wasn’t it?

See it’s not always true then, at all, that positivity leads to positive results, and negatively leads to negative results. Sometimes as we remember this weekend, positivity leads to catastrophe. It can’t happen here. Can’t happen to me. And sometimes dealing with various negative realities can have very positive results. We have to think this through because this is a huge dynamic in our groups. There is a huge pressure to be nice, to think positively, to think that it can’t happen here that goes too far. Far enough that it can easily become a way to wall out the truth.

Welcome to our Gospel today. Because this is exactly the issue that our lesson addresses. Jesus of course has been on a journey with his disciples. And so far it’s been very successful, great crowds are following and he’s been having a bit of trouble with the Pharisees of course, he has his enemies, but as of now Jesus has been handling all of this this well. By all appearances you can see how the outlook might be optimistic for a rosy future.

When suddenly, out of the blue, Jesus begins to teach his disciples that he’s going to be killed, and after three days rise. He begins to talk about all of this negativity that is going to take place. Suffering, rejection, and death. And Peter of course has a fit. He doesn’t even listen to part about rising after 3 days. The minute Jesus starts in the with negativity he is instantly out. No way, he is just not going to entertain these kinds of negative thoughts. And he literally in the Greek says exactly the same thing that the wife I spoke of earlier said to her husband when he wondered if his daughter was on the plane. The text says he rebukes Jesus. But a more accurate translation of the Greek would be this. Shut up. Sorry, that’s the literal translation here. Don’t even think like that. This is no game being played. Peter is literally angry and tells Jesus I’m not going to listen to this. I won’t hear of this. No way can this happen to you. I won’t have all of these “negative waves”. This should be really easy for us to understand. Come on Jesus, don’t be so negative. Don’t be such a pessimist, Jesus. Sound familiar? We should be able I think to easily relate to Peter today.

Which makes what Jesus says next, not so easy. Get behind me Satan. And this is getting ugly. I feel awkard about it but there’s that word again. Shut up. Except this time, Jesus says it to Peter. There is Peter trying to be optimistic, trying to think happy thoughts, look on the bright side, don’t be such a pessismist and Jesus calls him Satan for doing so. It’s a tough lesson, but it’s one that needs to be given. What’s the problem? The problem happens when optimism and positivity get in the way of the truth. When it walls out a negative reality that need to taken seriously. Do you see how evil is functioning here? It’s the way we put our lives together so that we don’t need to look at what is really happening. You can call it rose colored glasses or whatever you want. But that’s the problem here.

Now of course you can go the other way. I’m great at this. Negativity can wall out the truth too. You can do…. what if this happens, what if that happens, and create huge pessimistic realities in your head that are just as big of a wall against reality as optimism can be. You can create a crisis where there is none. Someone doesn’t speak to you and you instantly think they don’t like you. It’s real easy to make a mountain out of a molehill, no doubt. Really easy to jump to negative conclusions that are just as effective at walling out reality as optimism can be.

But either way, we can see in our lesson today, that Jesus is beginning to help his disciples and his followers face a very painful truth. That’s what he meant by taking up the cross. Peter recoils, he sees this as negativity. But it’s not, it’s the truth. See, Jesus didn’t come to be optimistic or a pessimistic or positive or negative. Jesus came to reveal the truth on a cross. Is that positive or negative? Optimistic or pessimistic? He tells his disciples that we will undergo great suffering and rejection and on the third day rise. Well, just take it at face value and what he is saying is this. You get to the positive in life, by facing the negative in life. The ugly truth of it. There is no positive in the Christian life, without facing some painful, ugly realities.

We can do it today, as our country remembers 9/11. What would taking up our cross mean as remember the 20th anniversary of that event? Just get in touch with the great suffering that happened on that day. Get in touch with the rejection. Don’t save your life from it. Let it in. See if you can take up your cross today with just that example. Because the way and truth and life that is Jesus is the message is that if you can follow him into that ugly reality, you will begin to see the light. Something will begin to happen in your own heart. That just might raise you from the dead and create someone who loves more and is committed more to the people of this earth. That is the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There is more positivity and optimism than you can imagine waiting for you. But the way to it comes from facing some painful realities in yourself, in your community, in your world. That’s Word man. That’s the story. That’s the way it works.

See, in Christ, in the presence of the Spirit of Jesus, it’s not a matter of being positive or negative. The truth is that what is positive comes from being able to face the negative. The joy of Jesus Christ comes from being able to look at your own sins, or suffering, or problems, and the problems of the world, and understand the call of discipleship, that as you face and own the ugly truth of them, you will learn what it means to be lifted up. Raised up on the third day. That’s the message. That’s stepping out in faith. If you think you’re going to get there by being an optimist, good luck. If you think being a pessismist is the way to go that won’t work either. What hope is, is the ability to walk into the negative far enough to see the light. When you’re dealing with your problems, instead of trying to walk around them like Peter wanted to, now you’re beginning to understand what positive might mean. Something like hope. I can face the negative and actually deal with it. That is what positivity is all about.

Look around at our world today. Are you optimistic or pessimistic about our world and our future on this 20th anniversary of 9/11? It’s just a bad question when it comes to Jesus Christ. Try not getting sucked into that for a while. Because the truth is there are just as many reasons to be pessimistic about our future as to be optimistic about our future. So either approach is just as valid. The future might be better or it might be worse. It doesn’t matter. What does matter is that you don’t become like Peter, refusing to entertain the notion that the future might actually be worse. Only willing to listen to the news you want to hear. You are not obliged in Jesus Christ to look at the world in an optimistic light. Don’t be sucked in by the peer pressure around you that doesn’t want to face reality or seek the truth. Face the problems in your life, face whatever problems you can and own them. Own where it hurts. Try to see where people are hurting around you. Let it in, take up your cross. Because that’s becoming a disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ. The promise is that as you take that painful journey God will make you a new creation. That’s the Good News today. Amen.