

Mark 8: 31-38  
March 8, 2009 Lent 2

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Last Sunday you may remember, we talked about the covenant promise of God. I am always with you; and we talked about temptations leading us to justification and broken promises. Now if you think that was heavy wait till we take apart what the gospel has for us today!

This is the week that we join the disciples in finding out what exactly the future holds for Jesus and his followers. Jesus lays it on the line here. We can't get too far into lent without knowing where it is all leading us and it is important for us to understand the extent to which it is leading us; all the way to the cross and beyond.

So, here is what Jesus says; "the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again". Heavy stuff!

Now wait a minute! Surely the Messiah, the long awaited Holy One wouldn't allow this to happen. What good is a dead Messiah? What good is a Messiah that is not going to take out the Romans? The Israelites were expecting a Messiah who would gather the forces, form a huge and powerful, well-armed and well-trained army and drive that Roman army out of power; off the face of the earth kind of power. And they had seen it in Jesus; he could heal the sick, raise the dead; this was their guy. Where do we sign up? When do we report to boot camp? Here we are Jesus, you say the word, we got your back!

Suffering, rejection, death, this can't be? Peter takes Jesus aside and has a conversation, "what are you talking about Jesus? You can't tell these people this; they are expecting something else! I'm expecting something else! They are following you to live out the promise of a land of milk and honey. A land promised ages ago to Abraham and Sarah; a land without oppression. They're here because Noah got a promise and Elijah, Elisha and Isaiah told the future that we would win over these oppressors once you came. What do you think you are doing?"

Jesus' response is clear, "get behind me Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." Pretty strong words coming from your Messiah, your friend and confidant, get behind me Satan! "You are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

And here in lies the rub, so to speak. You are setting your mind NOT on divine things but on human things. God's way is not the human way. Following Jesus is not about snap your fingers and the world is saved. It is hard work. It is full of contradiction and facing our human failings by taking responsibility for them. It requires us to do things we

do not want to do like forgive those who seem unforgivable, give grace freely and without second thought, work toward reconciliation to bring ourselves and others into right relationship. Hard work when our humanity wants to judge and form opinion, lock behind bars and throw away keys; nail to a cross and leave to die.

There's that pesky cross again. The next part of Jesus' message to us this week, "take up their cross and follow me". Boy have we ever made this about us. The cross Jesus is referring to is not a cross we bear because we are human although this is what we seem to think. We think of our cross as bad health, an annoying relative or a bad boss; I'm sure you have heard the expression when referring to these things, "well this is my cross to bear". Jesus is not referring to our humanity he is referring to things that result from following him.

Taking up the cross and following Jesus means you walk the crucifixion with him. The hard stuff even if it means standing before those who want to kill you and showing them love and compassion, you resist their evil, you lose your life in order to save it. Holy contradiction! Right! Holy contradiction! You lose your life in order to save it.

Don't you think that if you were one of the people following Jesus back in ancient times and you heard this you might just sneak off in the other direction? Maybe this guy is nuts; maybe I've made a huge mistake leaving everything behind and following him. No doubt some did go away. No doubt some could not understand what this was about and some got scared and went away. We often run from the things we don't understand. But Mark doesn't say anything about them he stays with the group that is staying with Jesus; even though he has promised them a cross.

We, the people who stay with Jesus are normal, everyday people, called to walk with him, to do the same things he does, to bear the same cross that he bears and Jesus believes we can do it. He has already told us we are the light of the world, bearers of light. Today he takes us to the next level, now we are bearers of the cross and that comes at a cost.

Theologian Carol Schnabl Schweitzer suggests that this kind of cross bearing requires us to recognise that there will be loss and that a grieving time will be necessary. She suggests we ask ourselves these three questions. 1) What do I relinquish if I work to alleviate suffering? 2) What do I relinquish if I work for justice? 3) What do I relinquish when confronted by oppression? These questions are about loss but they have a flip side.

The questions could be asked in this way; What is gained from engaging in these activities associated with a resistance faith? Now there's something I hadn't heard of before, a resistance faith. Katherine Henderson identifies a resistance faith as those who subscribe to a belief that they are called to alleviate suffering, oppression, and injustice. They feel a responsibility to resist evil, not simply avoid it; they rely on an inner authority; and they strive to reclaim radical or root understandings of religious teachings. Meaning the old stories are reclaimed based on social, cultural and historical context;

not based solely on what they have become after being retold and rewritten over 2,000 years.

Do we, the church, respond to Jesus in the same way Peter does? Do we think of human things instead of divine things? Do we simply maintain the status quo and not change into the new reality of our world today? It is not our job as followers of Jesus to chastise and judge; it is our job to reflect the grace of the gospel and to be transformed as a community of faith willing to go all the way to the cross; all the way to that forgiving and transforming place so that we are ready to rise again on Easter morn into a new life, a new heaven and a new earth. Maintaining the status quo merely keeps us pining for a past that is no more and that is more emotional investment than the reality of today.

This is the second Sunday of Lent and time for us to be confronted with the reality of bearing the cross. Are you up for the challenge? Stay tuned, our journey has only begun.

Amen