

Sermon

2.25.23

Year B Mark 8: 31-38

³⁴ "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

Good morning, St. Dunstan Family!
Good morning to our online Family!

We have been gleaning insight from the Gospel of Mark for these past several weeks.

Here, we find a world of conflict and suspense,
a world of curious reversals and interesting ironies,
a world of action and political intrigue.

Hold on... this is starting to sound like a Netflix series, right?

The Gospel of Mark gives us no simple answers but does give us
tough challenges filled with irony and paradox.

In our Gospel reading for today we learn of one such irony.

Mark has placed this teaching moment of Jesus with his disciples
and with those who desire to become his disciples at the **heart** of his Gospel,
especially today's reading.

Let's take a look at Mark 8: 31

³¹[Jesus] began to teach them that 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.

A few verses earlier we hear Jesus raise the ultimate question, **“Who do you say that I am?”**

It is here Peter answer's swiftly and sincerely, “You are the Christ!”

Christ can be translated as **Messiah, God's chosen one, the Savior, Liberator**. It's the first time The M word is mentioned!

Jesus' question and Peter's answer constitute the essential hinge in both Mark's Gospel and our own life of faith.

Peter's classic response, “You are the Messiah,” seems to put everything he witnessed while traveling with Jesus these last three years in perspective. After being part of dramatic healings, listening to perplexing parables, witnessing incredible miracles, we can understand as the wheels of his mind churn. Then in his shocking conclusion can easily understand how these are characteristic activities of an **appealing** messiah sent to rescue from the heavy persecutions of this current Roman regime.

But wait one minute... Peter goes from this glorious epiphany, “You are the Messiah!” to a shame-filled deduction complete with an equally disturbing sequel: suffering, murder, W H A T????

Peter’s response (and my guess is our response would be the same if we did not know the end of the story) clearly indicates that this oh so recent revelation does not come as “good news.”

Take a look at Mark 8: 32-33

³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

Blessed Saint Peter: author of Scripture, chief Apostle, teacher and defender of the faith, pillar of the Early Church, purported benefactor of the Gospel of Mark, and martyr. It is little wonder that Saint Peter gets so much good press. However, there is one thing missing from this list. One thing, in fact, that is among the blessed Apostle’s greatest gifts: Peter had the unique ability to precisely find the perfect moment to say the wrong thing! Or, to put it another way, Peter was an expert at opening his mouth and inserting his foot! Perhaps his favorite meal was ‘Fillet of Sole.’ Oh, how I relate to St. Peter!

It becomes clear that when Peter calls him the Messiah, he may have the “right title” but the wrong understanding of what the title means for Jesus. We too, can get a wrong understanding.

That’s why we study scripture here and on our own, that’s why we meet together: to gain meaning and the right understanding.

When Jesus declares “quite openly” that he is going to suffer and be rejected and be killed, Peter does not want to hear that. I get it.

[One wonders if Peter even hears the last part of Jesus’ statement, the part about rising after three days.] Peter does not want to hear about a suffering Messiah. He apparently is looking for a Messiah who will establish God’s rule with power and authority, and who will bring his followers glory and reward. Rising from death after three days will not be adequate compensation for the horrors that precede it. One can only imagine how Jesus’ next teaching point was received: followers must also take up the cross, must lose themselves for the sake of the gospel, and must be prepared to die.

It’s truly a shocking twist, that the **savior** Messiah would suffer death. But in God’s surprising unpredictability, Jesus expands our understanding of the Divine to include the experience of humanity– from birth to death. Jesus’ entire life is a witness to **God’s faithful promise and continuous blessing**. God loves us so much that God sent Jesus as a human. A human who cried, got angry, got hungry, fought with his friends, and even died. That’s

a twist that both challenges assumptions and personalizes the Divine in a way that builds intimacy and personal relationship.

Let's talk about this verse, v.34,

³⁴He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

This needs some clarifying. Remember, Jesus often spoke in a way people had to dig down to decipher. He spoke in ironies, paradox, and enigmas.

To deny oneself is to let go, release **the false self** you have believed is truly you.

The false-self can be difficult to identify but some of the characteristic external behaviors of the false-self include:

self-protection, manipulation, self-promotion, and a need to distinguish ourselves from others.

Your sense of worth/well-being comes from what you have as in- your possessions, what you do: as in your accomplishments, or what others think of you as in people pleasing. Below the surface of our lives exist hidden motives, fear, jealousy, sadness, bitterness, and anger. The false self is defined as the personality we project to God and to others as we try to impress, survive, avoid exposure, and/or get our way.

Jesus wanted for his followers to know true life which is found in following him.

Jesus said to not just deny yourself but then to "take up their cross."

The symbol of the cross is a symbol of suffering. One such common feeling of suffering for all of humanity is **shame**. No one likes to talk about shame, but each one of us has experienced this feeling.

Brenè Brown says, “Shame is an epidemic in our culture.” You may ask this question.

Ok-Mtr. Leesa, remind me again, I know I have heard of her but who is Brenè Brown?

She is a researcher, storyteller, and a Houstonian, who has spent the past two decades studying courage, vulnerability, shame, and empathy. In 2010 she gave a TED Talk, “The power of vulnerability,” which is one of the most viewed talks in the world. You can watch it on YouTube and join the 64 million viewers.

What’s a TED Talk you ask? TED is an acronym for **technology, entertainment, and design**. A TED talk is a recorded public-speaking presentation.

Her TED talk on shame which had “only” 19 million views she says,

“Shame drives two big tapes (playing inside your head where you say to yourself) -- “ (I am) never good enough” – and ... “who do you think you are?” The thing to understand about shame is, **it's not guilt**.

Shame is a focus on self, guilt is a focus on behavior.

Shame is “I am bad.” Guilt is “I did something bad.” Everyone sitting in here knows the warm wash of shame.

Jesus said, **“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”**

By recognizing our cross of shame, we can follow Christ by becoming vulnerable as he was vulnerable. Brown said, “Courage, compassion, and connection are the tools we need for the wholehearted journey.” (And to combat shame.)

I connect what she said exactly with what Jesus says in Mark 8. We need courage to deny ourselves- our false sense of who we think we are. We need compassion: co- meaning “with” and passion meaning “suffering” as like suffering with Christ as we take up the shame we feel, and He felt. Thus, follow Him with the true sense of who we are, our true selves, who God created us to be!

A different version (The Message) says this of Mark 8:34-37,

“Calling the crowd to join his disciples, Jesus said, “Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You’re not in the driver’s seat; I am. Don’t run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I’ll show you how.

Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to saving yourself, your true self. What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you? What could you ever trade your soul for?”

In our life of conflict and suspense, curious reversals, and interesting ironies, I invite you to release your false self, recognize your own suffering of shame, become vulnerable to what Jesus offers you, your true self, through following Him as He shows you the way.

