

Be with the Hurting, Be with the Broken

Sermon by Pastor Patrick Fish
February 24-25, 2018
Lent 2
Mark 8:31-38

*Grace and Peace to you from Christ, who frees us to be.
Be a follower of Christ with our center on the cross. Amen.*

Move 1: Redirection

When I was growing up, I was a rascal. I'm a troublemaker now and that started from an early age. I regularly heard my full name: "Patrick James Fish."

In fact, for a while, when teachers asked my name, I would scream, "PATRICK" because my mom rarely said. "Pat." She continually had to scream to get my attention.

I'm still getting used to being called "Pastor Patrick" here because I always feel like someone is addressing me respectfully, but also that I'm in trouble. I'll get there.

I'll never forget all those time-out talks with my parents. When I had to calm down. Redirect my eyes. Redirect my emotions. And my mom's favorite line was always, "Can't wait till you have kids. Then you will see."

Fast forward twenty-ish years later. My mom was right. As always.

My daughter, Ellie. She, like her father, is a stinker. A troublemaker. Her favorite word is "No."

"Ellie, let's get an outfit on for church."
"No."

"Ellie, let's brush your teeth."
"No."

"Ellie, do you like the word no?"
"No."

I remember when getting out the door didn't take an hour. Oh, the glory days. There are days, man, that I just want to pull my hair out.

I remember thinking how fun it would be to teach my kid how to throw a football. Play in the back yard. Build forts. Yeah, one day I'll get there. But these days, it's potty training and teaching Ellie not to hit her sister for the third time because Maddie is playing with one of Ellie's toys.

Ellie and dad have a lot of one-on-one talks. Where we calm down. Redirect our emotions. Redirect her to move from anger to compassion. From “no, I hate sissy” to “yes, I love baby sister.”

Redirection can seem like reprimanding but it's not. It's being direct. It's intentional. It's open and plainly airing out grievances.

That's how I see the interaction between Peter and Jesus in Scripture. Jesus is redirecting Peter—and the rest of us. Jesus isn't reprimanding Peter. Jesus is speaking plainly and directly about what must happen. What the Son of Man must endure on behalf of humanity.

Move 2: Scripture

Jesus speaks quite openly to the disciples.

He openly shares about God's will and design for the Son of Man. The Son of Man will undergo great suffering, be rejected by established lay leaders, pious pastors, and Bible scholars. He will be killed on a cross and rise three days later.

Wait, *what?*

This doesn't compute in Peter's brain. Now, we have two-thousand years of perspective, but in that moment, we, too, would have been completely dumbfounded by this open admission by Jesus. It doesn't make sense from a human point of view.

People in authority don't die on crosses. The Son of Man has the ultimate authority. He can rid people of demons. Heal the sick. Teach with zeal and charisma. Yet, here he is, going to die a criminal's death.

Death on the cross is humiliating. It is excruciating. It isn't the path or way that Jesus deserves.

So, Peter speaks up: “Jesus, stop talking in this way. You cannot do this. You mustn't do this! What can we do to stop this from happening?”

And that's when we have the redirection by Jesus. A heated exchange in which Jesus actually refers to Peter as Satan. Seriously!?

But, we remember, Jesus also appoints Peter, along with the other men and women followers, to continue his mission and ministry. That he and others will be the Church that carries on after Christ has died and risen.

But this interaction shows how high the stakes are. How important this is for us, as disciples and followers, to understand.

Jesus stops Peter, and us, from getting caught up in human thinking. Jesus stops us and tells us to redirect our eyes, minds, and hearts to Godly things. To get out of our own way and redirect ourselves again in God.

Peter asks openly, “What can I do?”

Jesus answers plainly, “Nothing. “

There’s nothing Peter, you, or I could do to stop the Son of Man from suffering, dying, and rising. The destination of the cross is set. There’s no stopping it.

Peter desperately wants to do something. To show how much he cares about Christ. He feels compelled to do anything that can prevent this disaster from happening to Jesus.

As professor Gerhard Forde put it, in discovering that there is nothing they or we can do, we are all freed. There is nothing we do that earns God’s love. There is nothing we do that earns our place in heaven. There is nothing we do that earns our salvation.

(Gerhard Forde, workingpreacher.org)

It’s all accomplished and finished by what Christ did for us. All by what Jesus did on the cross.

Nothing has ever sounded so good.

Now that we are freed from feeling the urge to *DO*, we are freed to *BE*. To be a follower of Christ. To be a disciple who doesn’t flee from the cross, who knows that following Christ always entails the cross.

Move 3: Monkey Business

Our eyes and thinking get caught like Peter’s all the time. It’s extremely difficult to live Christ-directed and Christ-centered lives. It goes against everything we learn in society. Where the focus is on self. Knowledge is power. Your worth is determined by what you accomplish.

These ways of thinking are in all of us. Peter didn’t understand or fully grasp what Jesus was sent into the world for. He couldn’t see. Just as Jesus redirected Peter, he is calling to us to redirect our eyes. To redirect our lives. To recenter on Jesus on the cross.

I want to show a clip that I think highlights just how easy it is for our eyes to get distracted. How many of you have heard of the Monkey Business Illusion? As you watch, I want you to count how many times the people dressed in white throw the ball to another person. The players go fast. so you really have to focus on the number of times

the people wearing white pass the ball. Most people can't get the exact number of passes. Let's see how good your eyes truly are.

[YouTube video shown: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGQmdoK_ZfY]

How many times did they pass the ball? The correct answer is 16.

So maybe you had the correct answer of passes but you missed the gorilla. Or you missed the curtain changing. Or you missed one of the people wearing black leaving. The point is we are limited in our thinking. We are limited in what we understand. We are limited in what we see.

We cannot see the whole picture. The whole design. Only God can.

So we can move from thinking our faith is centered on self, on what we do or don't do. Faith isn't about earning our ticket to heaven. We don't achieve God's grace and love. We remember today, and every day, that we are saved by grace through faith. We remember that our past is forgiven. That our future is secured. Not by what we did, but by what Christ did. Not for *us* deciding to have faith, but for God coming down to us, loving us, and choosing and deciding us.

That is the gospel. That is the message we, and everyone, needs to hear. That is the truth Christ died on the cross for. That is the truth that frees us.

We are freed from yesterday and for tomorrow. So today we be.

We be a follower of Christ in the present. Not weighed down by our past. Not worried about our future. We stand firm with our center in Christ. With our eyes set on the cross. Determined. Ready. Alert for whatever cross moments might arise.

Move 4: Parkland, Florida

Last week, we watched and read about the horrible tragedy in Parkland, Florida. Another school shooting. Another 17 people ripped from this world way too soon due to gun violence.

I'm still shook up. I was numb last week. Now I have moved to anger. And this week, I've been praying to God: What should I do? What can I do? I've been a pastor for four years, and I've preached on school shootings and gun violence too many times.

Lord, listen to your children praying. How long, O Lord, how long!?

I've been so focused this last week on what I need to do. And, friends, make no mistake I do think things need to be done. I agree with Pastor Pat that we need to hang up our

bows. Our weapons. That divide us. That kill us. I'm not afraid to voice that openly, plainly, and directly.

But through this interaction between Peter and Jesus, I am reminded that following Christ is about *being*. Being centered in God's grace. First being loved. Receiving grace before responding to that grace.

Freed and renewed, I then love. I then act. I then live for the sake of the neighbor and for the sake of the gospel. But it's always following Christ's steps rather than my own. It's always being and standing firmly in the Son of Man's presence.

We hear the incredible stories about people like Aaron Feis, an assistant football coach who laid down his life to protect kids. We watch as students are courageously and honestly speaking truth to power. And it dawns on me again: God is at work.

God is alive and working in the midst of this tragedy. Rather than focusing on *me*, I am redirecting my eyes outward. I'm redirecting my ears and listening to the Spirit proclaim transformation and new life.

Following Christ entails the cross. Not fleeing from it, but embracing the "cross-moments" that arise today. In the present.

Together, we don't avoid what is happening down in Parkland, Florida. We don't ignore the hurt, pain, and brokenness in our world.

No, we be with the hurting. We be with the broken. We be with the suffering. For this is the life Christ lived, and it's the life we follow now as his disciples.

Amen.

Resources

Gerhard Forde, workingpreacher.org

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