

March 8, 2009

Scripture: Mark 8: 31-38

Sermon: "Setting Your Mind"

I have to admit that I struggle with this passage as a person of faith. I struggle with the image of Jesus rebuking Peter. I struggle with Jesus' teaching about deny oneself. I struggle with Jesus' teaching to pick up one's cross and follow him. I have to admit that I struggle with this passage.

Every time I read this story, I question why Jesus basically yelled at Peter and called him Satan. That's not the Jesus that I read about in the preceding stories. That Jesus was kind. That Jesus was loving.

I question why Jesus thought the way to get disciples was to tell them that they would lose their lives for the sake of the Gospel. That's not the Jesus that I read about in the preceding stories. That Jesus simply told the fishermen to drop their nets and that he would make them fishers of people. Jesus simply said "Follow me."

I question why Jesus felt the need to talk about how he would suffer, be rejected, and die with his disciples as a way to explain his ministry. That's not the Jesus that I read about in the preceding stories. You see, up to this point, Jesus has had been doing his public ministry. He healed people. He taught people. He feed a multitude. That's the ministry of Jesus that I had read about up to this point. That's the ministry of Jesus that I remember. That's the ministry of Jesus that brings Good News to the people of God.

So why all this talk about suffering? So why all this talk about being rejected? So why all this talk about dying?

I find myself wanting to pull Jesus aside and have a heart to heart. "Jesus, don't you think you were a little hard there on Peter? Can't you see he was just trying to help? I mean after all, he was the one that gave the right answer when you asked who people say you are and who the disciples think you are. Peter said you were the Messiah. Give him a little credit.

And Jesus, since we are on the subject, don't you think you could give a better pep talk about discipleship. Today is a different time than when you lived. We don't have to worry about being persecuted for being a follower of you. And I have to tell you, people really don't like hearing about all that suffering, rejecting, and dying sort of stuff. Let's focus on the positive. That's what people want to hear. That's what people need to understand about being your disciple. That's what is going to get people in the door.

So please, Jesus, no more of this talk about suffering, rejecting, and dying. You are the Christ. You are the Messiah. Let's focus on the positive about these statements, okay?"

And I hear a voice saying, "Get behind me Satan. You are setting your mind on human things, not divine things." I hear a voice saying that it is human nature to want to avoid the negative and focus on the positive. I hear a voice saying that it is human nature to want to avoid pain at all

cost. I hear a voice saying that it is human nature to ignore the cross and skip right to the joy of the resurrection.

I hear a voice saying You are setting your mind on human things, not divine things.

For growth can only come through the pain of change. For new life can only come through the pain of labor. For resurrection can only come through the pain of the cross.

And it is our job, our calling as disciples to constantly hold these things in tension. It is our responsibility as people of faith to understand the relationship of how Jesus is understood as the Messiah, as the Christ and how that understanding of Jesus shapes what is involved in discipleship for us as Christians.

And that is Mark's point for us today. That is Mark's lesson for us today as Christians. We cannot claim to be Christians, we cannot claim to be people of faith when we sanitize or skip over the cross. Because this moment, this story where Jesus is predicting his suffering, predicting his death holds the integrity of the Christian faith. And we can't tell the story of the resurrection, of new life without the pain, without the despair of the cross.

For growth can only come through the pain of change. For new life can only come through the pain of labor. For resurrection can only come through the pain of the cross.

That is why Jesus rebukes Peter. That is why Jesus turns to the crowd and begins to tell the about the hardships of discipleship. That is why Jesus says that one must deny oneself, pick up his or her cross, and follow him. Because discipleship is not easy. Because discipleship comes with sacrifice. Because discipleship will lead us into situations where we may be at odds with friends, with family, with society and it is going to be hard. It is going to be uncomfortable. It is going to be painful.

Jesus realizes that even though Peter gave the right answer about who he was-The Messiah, Peter didn't understand what it really meant for Jesus to be the Messiah. Peter and the disciples had seen all the amazing things he had done. They had seen him heal people. They had heard him preach about the Kingdom of God. They had seen Jesus do amazing miracles. They thought that this great work would continue. They thought Jesus would change lives by going into downtown Jerusalem and showing those Romans whose who! Things were going to change around here!

Peter and the disciples were focusing on the positive things and ignoring that Jesus was a different kind of Messiah. Peter and the disciples wanted to avoid all this talk about suffering because come on what kind of Messiah say that he would suffer, be rejected, and die? Peter and the disciples wanted to skip the cross and go right to joy of the Kingdom of God. They were setting their minds on human things, not divine things.

And Jesus says that it doesn't work that way. Being the Messiah doesn't work that way. The way to new life doesn't work that way. Salvation doesn't work that way. because growth can only come through the pain of change. because new life can only come through the pain of labor. because resurrection can only come through the pain of the cross.

Jesus is trying to get the disciples and us today to understand that being a follower of Jesus will not be an easy thing to do. He is trying to get them to understand that simply because they and we have taken Jesus as our Lord and Savior does not mean our lives will be easy. Jesus is trying to get the disciples and us to understand that simply because we are believers does not mean that we will not suffer.

Actually, being a follower of Jesus will mean the exact opposite! We will be lead into difficult situations where we will be called to speak out against the injustices that we see in our world. We will be lead into uncomfortable situations where we will be called to speak for the voiceless in our world. We will be lead into painful situations where we will be called to shine the light in the darkness.

And it will not be easy. But it is what we must do as followers of Jesus Christ. We must bear our crosses of discipleship and do the will of God, no matter the cost.

You see, Jesus is trying to show the disciples and us that yes, there is power in healing, but there is also power in suffering. Yes, there is power in victory, but there is also power in loss. Yes there is power in a shout, but there is also power in a small still voice.

Hear the Good News: We know as people of faith that everything will be okay. We may not be sure of what okay will look like because there are no guarantees, there are no promises. All we know is that it is going to be okay because the presence of God is with us.

And we know that through the power of the cross, through the power of Jesus suffering, through the power of Jesus dying, death and suffering do not have the last word. God does! And that is the good news of the cross. That is the good news of the sacrifice of discipleship. That is the reward that outweighs the cost in discipleship. God has the last word. And it is a word of love. It is a word of grace. It is a word of hope.

For growth can only come through the pain of change. For new life can only come through the pain of labor. For resurrection can only come through the pain of the cross.

Our challenge this Lenten season is to really hear Jesus' message about why he must suffering, be rejected and die. Our challenge this Lenten season is to not silence or rebuke Jesus for telling us about his sacrifice for oursakes. Our challenge this Lenten season is to continue this journey to Jerusalem, knowing that there is suffering ahead, knowing that there is death ahead, knowing that the pain and despair of the cross is still ahead of us.

Our challenge this Lenten season is to really struggle with what it means for Jesus to be the Christ and how this meaning will shape our understanding of discipleship.

Because growth can only come through the pain of change. For new life can only come through the pain of labor. For resurrection can only come through the pain of the cross.

Hear the good News once more: God took something that the world thought was foolish, dying on the cross, and turned it into a powerful sign of new life. Because God has the last word. And it is a word of love. It is a word of grace. It is a word of hope.

May we always set our mind on divine things and not humans things as we live out our calling as disciples of Christ. Amen.

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