

Sunday Lesson – September 12, 2021

GOSPEL: Mark 8: 27-38



“The Messiah”

Context

“These verses are crucial for understanding the Gospel according to Mark as a whole and for fathoming what it means to be Christian. Almost exactly at the book’s midpoint, this passage initiates a major shift in Mark’s plot. The word *Christ* has not appeared since the Gospel’s opening verse. We have had seven-plus chapters of Jesus’ ministry, questions asked about his true identity and authority, secrets told and disclosure promised, and demonic powers identifying Jesus as God’s Son. Readers have been given no indication that death awaits Jesus, although if you know the book’s ending maybe you see foreshadowing in his baptism (1:9-11), the opposition he encounters (3:6), and John’s execution (6:14-29).

Before the scene ends, Jesus announces, for the first of multiple times, his impending suffering, rejection, death, and resurrection. Already he has beckoned some to follow and appointed apostles (3:13-19a), but now he *describes* what following means: it’s self-denial and cross-bearing. Now we see where this road of discipleship will lead: in losing one’s life, and ironically thus to save it.” *(Excerpts from workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/ordinary-24-2/commentary-on-mark-827-38 by Matt Skinner)*

Insight

“Peter gets the title right, but he doesn’t seem to understand what that title means. And so when Jesus begins to talk not about the road to glory but instead the one that leads to the cross, Peter rebukes him...and then Jesus rebukes Peter right back.

Which calls into question our own understanding of Jesus. Because we have to admit that Peter’s definition of “messiah” is usually the one we prefer as well. Peter, we, and just about everyone we’ll ever know want a strong God, a God who heals our illnesses, provides ample prosperity, guarantees our security, urges our military and sports teams onto victory, and generally keeps us happy, healthy, and wise.

But that’s not what Jesus offers. Instead, Jesus points to a God who meets us in vulnerability, suffering, and loss. A God who meets us, that is, in those moments when we really need God, when all we had worked for, hoped for, and striven for fall apart and we realize that we are, quite simply, mortal, incapable of saving ourselves and desperately in need of a God who meets us where we are. Jesus’ identity proves elusive precisely because God shows up just where we least expect God to be. Which means that we don’t get the God we want, but instead the God we need.” *(Excerpts from davidlose.net/2015/09/pentecost-16-b-intriguing-elusive-captivating-and-crucial/ by David Lose)*

Gospel Reading

“Jesus and his disciples headed out for the villages around Caesarea Philippi. As they walked, he asked, “Who do the people say I am?” “Some say ‘John the Baptizer,’” they said. “Others say ‘Elijah.’ Still others say ‘one of the prophets.’” He then asked, “And you—what are you saying about me? Who am I?” Peter gave the answer: “You are the Christ, the Messiah.” Jesus warned them to keep it quiet, not to breathe a word of it to anyone. He then began explaining things to them: “It is necessary that the Son of Man proceed to an ordeal of suffering, be tried and found guilty by the elders, high priests, and religion scholars, be killed, and after three days rise up alive.” He said this simply and clearly so they couldn’t miss it. But Peter grabbed him in protest. Turning and seeing his disciples wavering, wondering what to believe, Jesus confronted Peter. “Peter, get out of my way! Satan, get lost! You have no idea how

God works.” Calling the crowd to join his disciples, he 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. “If any of you are embarrassed over me and the way I’m leading you when you get around your fickle and unfocused friends, know that you’ll be an even greater embarrassment to the Son of Man when he arrives in all the splendor of God, his Father, with an army of the holy angels.” *The Message*

What It Could Mean?

“First-century Jewish messianic hopes varied, but none of them expected a messiah crucified by elders (lay leaders), chief priests (tall-steeple preachers), and scribes (biblical scholars). Writings like 4 Ezra (11-12), 2 Baruch (40, 72), and Qumran’s Damascus Document (6.7-11) dreamt of idealized rulers who would judge the wicked and restore Israel’s righteous. Instead: “The Son of Man is ordained by God to suffer, die, and be raised. And so are his followers. Are you coming?”

One of the ways modern Christians sashay around this question is to trivialize the cross. Crucifixion was an instrument designed for its victims’ utter degradation and excruciating torture: capital punishment so vile that it appalled even tough-minded politicians. “To bind a Roman citizen is a crime; to flog him, an abomination. To slay him is virtually an act of murder. To crucify him is—what? No fitting word can possibly describe a deed so horrible” (Cicero, *Against Verres* 2.66.170).

“For whoever would save her life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what does it profit a person, to gain the whole world and forfeit one’s life? For what can a person give in return for one’s life?” (Mark 8:35-37

my translation). “Life” is an imperfect translation of the Greek term *hē psychē*: “the creature’s center; one’s inmost self.”

A thought experiment for this Sunday: in what ways do we pretend that Jesus didn’t mean this, or try to be our own messiahs and save ourselves? On what do we stake our lives? In what do we ultimately place our trust? Our bank accounts? (Luke 12:16–20.) Achievements? (See Matthew 7:21–23.) Prestige? (Mark 12:38–40.) Politicians? (Mark 12:13–17) Guns? (Matthew 26:51–52.) Run down the entire list of familiar evasions and remember how Jesus locks every escape hatch. Doctrinal confusion is not the Christian’s fundamental problem. Instead, it is disobedience: our refusal to accept Christ’s authority over our lives.” (*Excerpts from workingpreacher.org; Revised Common Lectionary by C. Clifton Black*)

Readings for Further Study

- [Matthew 16:23](#) “*Get behind me Satan*”
- [Colossians 3:2/Isaiah 55: 8-9](#) *Setting mind on things of God*

Thought for the Day

“Jesus Christ died to save us from our sins; we tend to concentrate on that merciful fact. But isn’t it also true He lived to show us a lifestyle free from sin? So, wouldn’t following in his footsteps be something like preventative medicine?” ~ *Richelle E. Goodrich, Making Wishes: Quotes, Thoughts, & a Little Poetry for Every Day of the Year*

A Prayer

“Lord Jesus Christ, alive and at large in the world, help me to follow and find you there today, in the places where I work, meet people, spend money, and make plans. Take me as a disciple of your kingdom, to see through your eyes, and hear the questions you are asking, to welcome all others with your trust and truth, and to change the things that contradict God’s love, by the power of the cross and the freedom of your spirit.” **Amen.** ~ *John V. Taylor*