

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt
Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost - Year B
80th Sunday of Pandemic - Indoor Service
Isaiah 50:4-9a
Psalm 116:1-9
James 3:1-12
Mark 8:27-38
Service Book and Hymnal Sunday
09/12/2021

Gospel

The Holy Gospel is written in the 8th chapter of St. Mark, beginning at the 27th verse:

²⁷ And Jesus went out, and his disciples, into the towns of Caesarea Philippi: and by the way he asked his disciples, saying unto them, Whom do men say that I am? ²⁸ And they answered, John the Baptist; but some say, Elias; and others, One of the prophets. ²⁹ And he saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ. ³⁰ And he charged them that they should tell no man of him. ³¹ And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² And he spake that saying openly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him. ³³ But when he had turned about and looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men. ³⁴ And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. ³⁵ For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. ³⁶ For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? ³⁷ Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? ³⁸ Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

Here endeth the Gospel for the Day.

NRSV Translation

27 Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?”
 28 And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” 29 He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” 30 And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him. 31 Then he 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. 32 He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 But 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.” 34 He 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. 35 For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. 36 For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? 37 Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? 38 Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
 Amen.

Carrying the Cross

Good morning! What do you think about when you imagine Jesus and God? Pop-culture has portrayed them in all sorts of different ways. Do you think like the Simpsons, imagining an old man with a grey beard standing on a cloud somewhere up above? Or maybe you go with the movie Talladega Nights, with Jesus singing with an angel choir while he sports a mullet. In the 1999 movie Dogma we were surprised when God appeared as a mute Alanis Morissette, dancing in the grass. Morgan Freeman has been another popular choice, with his wonderful voice helping us to imagine God.

In scripture, one of the most powerful images of God, for me, comes from the Old Testament in the book of Isaiah. God arrives across the distance in the form of a storm, an image anyone from out west can appreciate. As God moves across the wilderness, the clouds roil with lightning and energy, crackling with power. It's an image that makes it clear that God isn't messing around. So, returning to the original question, take a moment and think about how you imagine God... Done? Ok, now forget what you just had, because much like Peter, Jesus works hard to remind us that we often get it wrong.

I get where Peter is coming from, as he had traveled with Jesus he had seen things that he had never thought would be possible. So when he confesses that Jesus is the Messiah, he arrives at that belief with some heavy expectation. In the first century the assumption was that the Messiah would be someone who came with great power and strength. They would be a political and military leader who rallied Israel to arms, driving out their enemies and ushering in an age of prosperity and riches unlike anything they had ever seen before. When Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah, he's expecting great things from Jesus. What he didn't expect was the first passion prediction.

It's important to take special note with how our story is presented. The Gospel writer of Mark has intentionally chosen to put Peter's confession of faith with Jesus' passion prediction. *"29He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." 30And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him. 31Then he 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."* (NRSV)

The Gospel writer is making it clear that in order for anyone to understand that Jesus is the Messiah, we need to look at things through the lens of the cross. But, that's easier said than done. In seminary, one of my professors, Dr. Everett, told us about a previous teacher's assistant who went the extra mile in helping first year seminary students see through the cross. They took it literally, buying up a bunch of cheap fake glasses and attaching a cross to the front with a section cut out in the middle so that one could literally look at things through the cross.

It's this sort of visual we need to adopt if we're going to understand today's lesson. One scholar summarizes it this way: *"This whole passage is scandalous. First, there is Peter's confession that Jesus is the Messiah, a title which Jesus promptly upends in a way that Peter never intended. Then there is the startling prediction of Jesus' suffering and death, which has prompted theologians ever since to try to decipher what it means to say that 'he MUST undergo great suffering... and be killed.'* (v. 31). *Finally, Jesus offers the bleak and cryptic call to discipleship as 'losing one's life.' After reading these verses, it is a marvel that anyone at all is left being a follower of Christ."*¹

She's right, if you get through that and still think this is all pretty flowers and happy days, you have been covering your ears. Not only have we misunderstood what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah, but then he goes on to make it very clear that we too have a cross to bear. *"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. 36For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?"*

Now this passage has often been twisted to justify abuse and other forms of suffering, but that is not what Jesus is saying. You are not called to suffer pain simply for pain's sake. But what Jesus is saying is that when we claim to be Christians, we are admitting that we will make sacrifices for the benefit of others. The cross we are called to carry is the reality that the world will take advantage of us, that we will experience pain because we live in a world that does not reward those who work to bring about God's plan for all of humanity with love and compassion.

So, we're going to do something we haven't done in a long time. I'm going to give all of us a few minutes of silence to think about the ways in which we have misunderstood what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah, and how specifically that might call on us to change the ways we live our own lives. Then I'll finish with a prayer... THE Peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

¹Bartlett, David L., and Barbara B. Taylor. *Feasting on the Word. Year B, Volume 4.* Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008. P. 68.

