

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt  
Second Sunday in Lent - Year B  
St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16  
Psalm 22:23-31  
Romans 4:13-25  
Mark 8:31-38  
02/25/2024

### **Gospel**

The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark:

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.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." 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. 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? 37Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? 38Those 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."

The Gospel of Our Lord.

### **Prayer**

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

Amen.

### **Towards the Cross**

Good morning! If you were here a few weeks ago for Transfiguration Sunday, this text should sound a little familiar. I mentioned it in my sermon, and I know you all remember every single thing I have preached, so I'm sure it rings a bell. If you happened to miss worship that Sunday, the story still rings familiar. Jesus' rebuke of Peter is one of the more memorable stories in the Gospels. It probably feels all the more painful for Peter, who just before this part of the text has rightly guessed that Jesus is the messiah. *"<sup>27</sup>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?" <sup>28</sup>And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." <sup>29</sup>He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." <sup>30</sup>And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him."*<sup>1</sup> Our Gospel lesson picks up right from there. Peter goes from getting it all right to all wrong. But we know how the story ends, and so I think we need to take a step back before we judge Peter too harshly.

There are two factors to consider. The first is what the Messiah meant for the Jewish people. For roughly 750 years they had been under some form of occupation. David, their greatest king, was their first Messiah, and it was believed that one even more powerful would come to set the Israelites free again. The form this leader would take differed depending on who you asked. Some thought he would be a great military leader like David, someone who would defeat the Romans in battle. Others thought it

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 8:27-30 NRSV

might be a prophet or priest who would lead a religious revolution that would change the paradigm. Others thought it might be a leader like Moses who would guide them in some way that would cast off the Roman Empire. What the Messiah would certainly NOT be doing was dying on a cross. Which brings us to our second point.

The cross was the most heinous form of punishment that the Roman Empire had at its disposal. It was so brutal and grotesque that it was considered impolite and in bad taste to even discuss a crucifixion. The person was naked and tortured in front of a group of people to show what disobedience meant. It was so cruel that it was illegal to use it on a real Roman citizen. It was reserved for the worst of the worst.

Added to this was a little piece of scripture that complicated things. Deuteronomy 21:22-23a says *“22When someone is convicted of a crime punishable by death and is executed, and you hang him on a tree, 23his corpse must not remain all night upon the tree; you shall bury him that same day, for anyone hung on a tree is under God's curse.”*<sup>2</sup> The cross, a giant piece of wood, was seen as a “tree.” So how in the world could the Messiah, the one who would save Israel, end up on a cross? It just didn't make sense!

But God had a different plan, and it meant changing what the cross would mean for the whole of time. Normally this is where I would begin answering what the cross means for us as Christians. But that would spoil all the fun. So instead of me giving an answer, I want to hear from you. This lesson, the whole of Lent, and our faith is about the way the cross has changed our lives. So I'm going to hand out a form that asks “what does the cross mean for you, and why is it important?” We'll put the question in the

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<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy 21:22-23a NRSV

chat for those on Zoom and they can email me their answers if they would like. We will spend a few minutes for people to answer and when it looks like everyone is done, we'll close with a prayer. Let us pray. O God, by the passion of your blessed Son you made an instrument of shameful death to be for us the means of life. Grant us so to glory in the cross of Christ that we may gladly suffer shame and loss for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen