

“Suffering Servant”
Mark 8:27-38
Pollocksville Presbyterian Church
Sermon #113
9.12.21

Mark 8:27-38 CEB

27 Jesus and his disciples went into the villages near Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?”

28 They told him, “Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others one of the prophets.”

29 He asked them, “And what about you? Who do you say that I am?”

Peter answered, “You are the Christ.” **30** Jesus ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

31 Then Jesus began to teach his disciples: “The Human One must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and the legal experts, and be killed, and then, after three days, rise from

the dead.” **32** He said this plainly. But Peter took hold of Jesus and, scolding him, began to correct him. **33** Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, then sternly corrected Peter: “Get behind me, Satan. You are not thinking God’s thoughts but human thoughts.”

34 After calling the crowd together with his disciples, Jesus said to them, “All who want to come after me must say no to themselves, take up their cross, and follow me. **35** All who want to save their lives will lose them. But all who lose their lives because of me and because of the good news will save them. **36** Why would people gain the whole world but lose their lives? **37** What will people give in exchange for their lives? **38** Whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this unfaithful and sinful generation, the Human One will be ashamed of that person when he comes in the Father’s glory with the holy angels.”

The Word of the LORD. **Thanks be to God!**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Mark is a political Gospel. In the time when Caesar is considered to be a god-like figure for the people, Mark opens up with these words in chapter one:

The beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, God's Son...

It's not the beginning of the good news about Rome. It's not the beginning of the good news about Rome's wannabe god. It's not even the beginning of the good news of Israel's physical liberation from Rome. It's the beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, God's Son. Jesus the Christ. Christ is the title. It means Messiah, the Savior of the world. And Caesar can try all he wants

to be a savior, but he ain't it. Jesus is. Jesus is also God's Son. God's only Son. Again, Caesar can pretend all he wants, but he isn't. Jesus Christ, God's Son, is the Christ, the Savior, the Son of God. No empire. No ruler. No one or nothing else can rightfully claim Christ and Son of God. Only Jesus can. That's what makes Mark's Gospel so political. And no, political doesn't mean party affiliation. That's partisanship. Jesus Christ is not partisan and Jesus Christ is not wrapped up in the flag of any empire or country.

Jesus' did not come to physically liberate Israel, but he did come to liberate. He came to minister to those who were ignored by the first century's strongest empire, Rome. Throughout his life, he called out the partisan hacks who were foolish enough to believe that they were the saviors of the world. Numerous times in Jesus' life, he shook up the status quo of the religious officials. Jesus wasn't

partisan, but he was political. He got involved in the matters of the present time and the hereafter.

Mark also portrays Jesus as the Suffering Servant. Quite possibly, that upsets us even more than the political statements about Jesus Christ. Frankly, it's not attractive to worship someone who got down in the daily muck of humanity and was executed by the state doing what he was supposed to do. It's not what we expect the Savior to be. Yet, here is Jesus' prediction in verse 31:

The Human One must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and the legal experts, and be killed, and then, after three days, rise from the dead.

We don't expect the Savior to suffer and die AND we definitely can't explain how rising from the dead even works. It just doesn't make sense!

This is the first of three predictions of Jesus' death in Mark. In every instance, the disciples don't get it. Then, Jesus teaches them what discipleship means. In this instance, Peter, who for a brief moment gets who Jesus is, just can't stand the possibility of worshiping the Savior who would endure suffering and death. It doesn't make sense! And to make matters worse, Jesus teaches the disciples about taking up their cross in order to follow Jesus and to lose their lives in order to save them.

These verses today make the transition from the first half of the Gospel to the second half. Jesus is preparing the disciples for what must come shortly: Suffering, death, and resurrection. From this point forward, Jesus has his eyes toward Jerusalem where he is to be handed over to the civil and religious authorities to be executed. The heat is about to get hotter for Jesus and the disciples. Yet, his followers just don't get it.

I figure this is hard for us to get, too. Why would we want to worship the Prince of Life who was executed? Why would we want to follow the Savior who tells us to take up our cross when he couldn't even carry his own cross to his crucifixion? Why would we want to worship someone who doesn't promise any riches or power for this life? Why would we confess Jesus as the Christ who tells us that in order for us to save our lives we must lose them first?

Do you understand the problem here? No wonder Peter did what he did. He tried to fit Jesus in a box and was disappointed. In fact, he was so disappointed in Jesus, Peter later denied him! Peter had already created his own version of Jesus and his dream was shattered. Since Peter had his own version of Jesus, let's assume there were eleven other versions of Jesus with the other disciples. And if Peter and the other disciples had their own versions of Jesus

and they were let down, don't you think others who followed Jesus outside of the twelve were disappointed, too? And if Peter, the rest of the disciples, and the others had their own versions of Jesus, who's to say we don't? And if we say we don't we are lying! The Suffering Servant who loves the world who then tells us to take up our crosses in order to follow him is not our idea of a hero. Don't even begin to fool yourselves. You know I'm right. I'm guilty of it. WE ALL ARE!

In R. Alan Culpepper's commentary on Mark, he says that Peter's version of Jesus was wrapped up in "vindication, advantage, and privilege to him, to the disciples, to their families, and to the Jewish people."¹ Peter's understanding was dangerously limited to simply him and the disciples riding on the coattails of Jesus' power. Not having to sacrifice much at all. Just coast onto privilege and power. But, as is the case throughout our Savior's earthly life, he had a

¹ R. Alan Culpepper. *Mark*. Smyth & Hellwys: Macon, 2007. pp. 286-7.

radically different reality than Peter and the disciples. Instead of meeting the force of Rome with greater force, it is only the power of love, even at the cost of Jesus' own life, that could and would destroy the forces of evil. Instead of the way of weapons, the way of the cross was necessary. Instead of the popular version of Messiah that promises rewards and power in this life, the Messiah, Jesus the Christ, the Son of Humanity, must endure suffering. And we, as his followers, will endure suffering. We must take up our cross and follow the Savior.

“Take up your cross” is certainly a popular saying, but what's the true meaning of it? It's not about certain inconveniences. For example: The AC unit went kaput on Independence Day Weekend. No, it's not about the relative you can't stand at a holiday dinner, either. Taking up our cross means leaving the comfort zones we have built for ourselves. Taking up our cross is a commitment and

it requires sacrifice as we grow closer to the Savior, Jesus Christ. Taking up our cross is also doing what Jesus did: Stand up to the “corruption of religion, the oppression of the poor, and the perversion of justice.”²

Jesus certainly stood up to the corruption of religion. And what did that get him? Betrayal from a friend who handed Jesus over to an angry mob. Jesus certainly ministered to the poor who were oppressed by an evil empire. And what did that get him? Torture while Barabus was set free. Jesus most certainly called out the perversion of justice. And what did that get him? An execution.

If we claim to worship the Savior of the world who was willing to give up his life for us in order to bring us into a restored relationship with God, we must acknowledge that the Savior was the Suffering

² Ibid., 288.

Servant. Jesus is not the big dude with his AR 15 riding in on a tank wrapped up in the American flag. That's the partisan Jesus, not much different than Peter's version of Jesus. Our Savior was sent by our loving Parent, God the Creator, to live among us and to make us whole again. While the Suffering Servant did die, his death defeated death, so death does not and cannot have the final answer. Because death is not the Messiah. Empire is not the Messiah. No one else is the Messiah. Jesus Christ is the Messiah and he calls us to take up our cross and follow him.

Siblings in Christ, trust this Good News!

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.