

Peter's Declaration about Jesus [Mark 8.27–38]

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? And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

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. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 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.”

He called the crowd with his disciples and said to them, “If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 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. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? 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.”

We're not told exactly how Jesus explained this upcoming scenario of suffering, death, & resurrection.

While it may seem that his suffering & death would be the work of the religious leadership who are situated in Jerusalem,

Jesus speaks of the whole plan enacted under a “must”

– must suffer, must be killed, & must be raised!

Rejection & resurrection are interlocking parts in a bigger picture that provides the ultimate meaning of “who” Jesus is and “what” his mission is.

But this bigger picture isn't spelled out – the story isn't unfolded.

Jesus may have explained it further to his followers, but if he did,

Peter, the leader of the disciples who had just

confessed “You are the Messiah,” wasn't persuaded.

Whatever Jesus said, it seems that Peter heard nothing but to suffer & be killed.

This is so outside Peter's way of thinking that he feels compelled to take on the role of master, pull Jesus aside, & set him straight.

Jesus turns the tables on Peter and reveals a different way of thinking.

Jesus thinks that the rock that is the foundation of his church

has become a rock that is a stumbling block, an obstacle.

Peter must get back into a proper following of

Jesus & struggle to understand what Jesus has

predicted. The way Peter thinks is an ordinary way

of thinking. It's how humans like you & me put

things together.

But it's not how humans in touch with God put things

together & this is what Peter must learn.

Following Jesus calls for a new way of thinking,

a way of thinking that goes against conventional

thinking, culturally approved thinking.

Jesus says “my followers deny themselves” –

my followers don’t think about the avoidance of suffering & death at all costs.

This new way of thinking emphasizes the doing of God’s will

no matter what the consequences are.

In a world opposed to God’s will,

those consequences include suffering & death, but also resurrection!!!

Disciples are not to grudgingly endure this situation – they are to lean into it. This means taking up their cross, not having it put on them.

As they understand & do this,

it will become a path of transformation for

others & the path of resurrection for

themselves!

Jesus tries to help disciples understand that this following that looks like loss is really gain!!!

If disciples try to hold onto their present life

in its temporary security & social position,

they do this by not opening up to a deeper life.

In particular, they bend to the oppression of the civil & religious authorities because they fear reprisals.

It’s a sad but predictable fact that those who stand up get knocked down.

A woman reports accounting abuses at Wells Fargo & her supervisor thanks her & notes her courage & within a week is let go for no apparent reason.

Whistleblowers are a prime contemporary example.

A good cop reports that other cops in Seattle are abusing suspects. He is shunned & punished in very clever & often violent ways.

Criticism & cover–up go together,

& part of the cover–up is to eliminate the criticism.

Jesus is a fierce critic.

He pointed out the thoroughgoing hypocrisy of religious leadership. They were taken up with their own importance, loving the trappings of their position rather than its substance – recognition in the marketplace & the best seats at the head table.... They kept people from knowledge that would help them, laid burdens on them, & watched them falter.

Jesus saw clearly the systemic, institutional, & organizational abuse, and prophet that he was, blew the whistle on them – he protested; he turned tables upside down in the Temple.

You wonder why they killed him.

They would rather save the present way they are living at the expense of God's life coming to birth in them.

But it's this deeper divine life that is most valuable.

It would do them little to gain the whole world—there's no trade off.

You can be as rich and safe as you want in this world, and also sacrifice the great treasure of God's love and resurrection life for that.

It's not worth it.

And the cross you and I are called to take up in the name of Jesus and follow Him is one of service. It's one of service to the hungry, to those who need shelter, to those who need clothing.

That's where our baptism leads us, not into our own homes or bunkers, but out into the world—a continuation of the message of Jesus, the message and ministry of Jesus, who is always with us.

In His name,

Amen.