

Mark 8:31-38

³¹Then he (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."

Mark 8:31-38, 2015

Our Gospel lesson for today has been isolated from the few verses just before it which I believe are so important to understanding the reading we have for today

Those verses describe where Jesus and the disciples are, which symbolically is important,

and they reveal the beginning of the conversation that leads into the one Jesus continues with the disciples and then finally the crowd in our reading today.

The setting for all this is in Caesarea Philippi, which sits to the north in the province of Syria at the head of the streams and rivers that feed into the Jordan River.

To the south of there then the Jordan feeds the Sea of Galilee and finally the Dead Sea.

This is a place where many gods are worshipped, and was known as a shrine of the Greek and Roman nature God, Pan.

It is in a village there that place where Jesus asks the disciples,

“Who do people say that I am?”

And Peter says,

“You are the Messiah.”

It is a place like this, out in the world away from the safety of home,

where the chance for rejection and ridicule, maybe even hostility lies,

that Peter proclaims, and we are called to proclaim Jesus is the Messiah.

It is after this that Jesus begins to teach His closest followers what that really means;

“...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.”

You know what happens next.

Peter pulls Jesus aside and gets in His face and Jesus rebukes Peter;

“Get behind me Satan!”

But isn't it interesting that Jesus turns to the disciples when he does this. It is almost as if Jesus made the move to turn his back on Peter when he says,

“Get behind me Satan!”

He puts Peter right where he belongs, behind him, following Him; not trying to lead.

Peter has gotten out front of Jesus and has to be put back in his place.

You have to ask though, “Can you blame Peter?”

After everything he has seen in the time he has followed Jesus,
the miracles of healing the sick and lame, casting out demons, restoring sight to the blind, curing leprosy.

How could Jesus, who has that kind of power and strength possibly ever be subjected to what Jesus has described?

But you see, that is exactly where Peter makes his mistake. Peter views all these miraculous deeds as manifestations of Jesus strength and power

when in reality they are the manifestation of Jesus' love.

You see, the understanding of the day was that the Messiah would come and by power and strength overthrow Israel's oppressors and restore Israel's place in the world; a position of power and strength.

They would no longer be subjects of Rome or any other nation.

They anticipated a powerful new ruler of the world, and that ruler would be on their side.

Jesus is breaking some bad news to Peter and the others. This is not what they expect.

Jesus has come into the world to love His people and He defines love as sacrifice of self for others.

That is what He does, and in the verses that follow then,

that is what he teaches His disciples and the crowd He has called to gather around.

"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?

Take up your cross...

The disciples knew what Jesus meant when he said this. They had no idea Jesus would end up on a cross himself,

but crucifixion was such a common practice that they may have even seen a convicted criminal carrying his cross, or part of it, through the streets of Jerusalem being laughed at, spat upon, ridiculed and humiliated. So they had some idea what Jesus was talking about.

But when Jesus says this, what is it He is really saying? Are His followers to take this literally?

Jesus is calling His followers to surrender their claim to power and strength and serve others in love like He did.

You will suffer for it. Parts of you will even have to die for it because it will require humility and vulnerability enough to see the needs of others
and care for them with love.

You will have to be able to get out of your own way to seek what others need.

Does that mean you have to give everything away? No.
Does that mean you have to allow others to treat you like a doormat? No.

You can still enjoy the pleasures of life. Self respect and dignity are still yours to have.

But what it also means is that as you seek and recognize the need of the other, and serve them,

in that you come alive, you are lifted up and you experience God's love

These are things you do naturally with your children, and as children.

Consider Matthew Monroe who we had here just last week to collect the 183 pairs of shoes for those who need them.

Matthew had recognized someone else's need and served them in love. He took up his cross.

You do these things for family, friends, partners and neighbors.

Each time you question a want you have for the sake of a need someone else has you take up your cross,

and you not only share but experience God's love. In the process connections are made with others and you begin to feel complete, because you begin to feel like a part of something bigger than yourself,

not just the temporary satisfaction of the immediate gratification of your desire.

You experience life more fully, more joy, happiness and acceptance because you then, as you look out for others, find that others are looking out for you.

Community is created and you aren't alone any longer.

Jesus not only teaches you how to take up that cross, but shows you.

He died there for you.