

Mark 8:27-38

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^[a] 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^[b] will be ashamed of that person when he comes in the Father’s glory with the holy angels.”

What Have We Signed Up For?
(Persistent Inability to Understand)
Mark 8:27-38

Walter Brueggemann says when commenting on this passage in Mark, “Three times Jesus clarifies his suffering, death and resurrection (Mark 8:31; 9:31; and 10:30). Each time that prediction is followed directly by an incident in which disciples demonstrate with painful clarity their persistent inability to understand Jesus’ call to discipleship.” Over and over again the disciples miss it. I would suggest that over the last 2,000 years we, as Christians, have continually demonstrated our persistent inability to understand Jesus’ call to discipleship as well.

We look at Peter and say, “Poor foolish Peter. Jesus was right there in front of you and you missed it! What a dummy those disciples were. If we were alive then and had Jesus walking right beside us, we surely would have understood.” But I am not so sure we would have, for we have the distinct advantage of growing up knowing the resurrection, but we gloss over the rejection, the suffering and the dying part.

This past Thursday we were at Campus Fest inviting students to come be part of our open and affirming, welcoming community of faith. Did we say, “Come join us as we follow Christ in rejection, suffering and dying”? No, we said, “Here, have a Rice Krispy Treat and take a chance and spin for a \$10 gas card. Join us Wednesday for free pizza! It will be fun!” We did. I did. There was NO WAY I was going to invite students to the way of the cross. It is NOT appealing. So we say, “Come, it will be fun.”

So, have we, once again, demonstrated our persistent inability to understand what Jesus requires of us?

Jesus asks Peter, “Who do you say that I am?” And Peter answers what he thinks Jesus wants to hear. “You are the Christ!” And what does Jesus do? He tells him to tell no one. Why would Jesus say that? Was he testing Peter? Is Jesus afraid that too many people would then want to follow him? What’s with that? Huh?

Jesus “sternly ordered them not to tell anyone... Then began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering... He must be rejected... and killed.” Peter didn’t like what Jesus was saying. Jesus was changing the rules on him.

On Tuesday, the session is meeting with Janet Wright Thomas and Ellyn Stout, for they have expressed the desire to join the church as active members. What are we going to ask them? First, we’ll ask, “Is Jesus Christ your Lord and Savior?” And they will say, “Yes.”

Will we then talk about being rejected, suffering and dying? No, we don’t. But should we? If we are serious about our faith, serious about following Jesus, shouldn’t we bring it up?

Georgene Johnson lived in Cleveland. She was 42 years old and trying to have a good attitude about being 42. (Do you remember those days?) So she started running and exercising to keep in shape. She said, “I’m not going to look like I am 42, or at least I am going to look like a good 42 year old.”

She did well with her running, running farther each day. She thought she’d enter a 10k race. That’s about 6 miles. Nervous about her first race, she got up early, arrived at the start of the race and was surprised there were lots of people milling around, stretching, getting ready.

All of a sudden, a voice over the microphone said, “Move to the starting line.”

A gun sounded and they were off like a huge wave, hundreds of runners sweeping her up. She was in the race.

After about 4 miles it occurred to her that they ought to be turning around and heading back to the finish line. She stopped and asked an official. He said, “Ma’am, you are in the Cleveland Marathon...26.2 miles!” Her event, the 10K, was to start a half-hour after the start of the marathon.

Now, some would have stopped right there and said, “That’s it. I’m going home. I quit.” But to her credit, she kept right on going, finished the race. She said, “This is not the race I trained for. This is not the race I signed up for...but for better or for worse, this is the race that I am in.”

What are we in for when we declare Jesus as our Lord and Savior?

Who is this Christ? This Messiah? This Savior? This King of kings and Lord of lords, this One we are called to follow? He surely won’t get much of a following talking about suffering, and pain and dying! We don’t like pain. After surgery my doctor prescribed pain medicine and wrote, “The Goals of Pain Management Are: To keep your pain at a level that is acceptable to you.”

Jesus invites us to be rejected (that hurts)...to suffer (that really hurts)...and to die. We like comfort and success and riches. But Jesus doesn’t sugar coat it. He doesn’t make it palatable. He tells it like is it. He shares with us God’s Way but we have a persistent inability to understand.

The key to life is right here before us, but we still have the persistent inability to understand.

Thank God for those who have followed Jesus’ lead, those who have been faithful that show us the way. We do have models like those first responders who 20 years ago ran towards the crumbling Twin Towers, forsaking self, putting themselves in harm’s way trying to rescue others. 343 firefighters; 60 police officers; 8 emergency medical technicians and paramedics; 3 New York State Court Officers; 1 patrolman: Total 415 suffered and died for others. Nearly 3,000 died (2,977) and nearly 15% of them ran in...and that’s not talking about the hundreds of those already in the building who stayed behind to try and save others at the cost of their lives.

Yesterday at the Men's Breakfast we talked about that. What would we have done if we were there? I don't know what I would have done. What would you have done?

When we finally understand Jesus' sincere demands, which I am continually trying to do, but I don't have it yet, I need this community to help me, but when we do understand, we will live differently than our world does. We will stand up against the evil in the world. We will honestly face our horrid past of racism and white supremacy. We will acknowledge how we, the church, have harmed the LGBTQIA+ community with our poor theology and ignorant exegesis. We will speak out against the many ways we harm the environment and atrocities of war.

Our understanding of Jesus' call will affect the way we respond to the September 11, 2001 tragedy and the way we respond to the January 6, 2021 travesty. Our understanding of Jesus' call will affect the way we respond to the poor, the sick, and the elderly, the immigrant, the vulnerable. Our understanding will put us in danger with the world's authorities who state differently.

When we join this church in active membership, we first pronounce that "Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior". The Gospel of Jesus Christ is not about our security, our salvation, our comfort, our rewards, our happiness, our fun. It is about our discipleship, getting in line behind Jesus, with God's ways which demands our total allegiance to the point of rejection, suffering, and yes, even death. That my friends, is what we've signed up for. May this be so.

Preached by Rev. David M. Montgomery
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