

Mark 8 (27-38)
Second Sunday in Lent
February 25, 2024

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text, from St Mark's gospel, "And [Jesus] called the crowd with his disciples and said to them, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.... For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.'"

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

It's tempting to simply focus on the great confession of Peter (indeed, as we hear from other gospels, Jesus himself says it's the "revealed-from-my-Father-in-heaven" confession of Peter!)... it's tempting to simply focus on that, speak of Jesus as the Christ, and get into a meditation on what great words these are... what a great statement on the divinity of Jesus, or the two natures of the Christ, or even Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament expectation.

Or, we could meditate on Peter's *misunderstanding*, his horror and offense that the Christ and Son of the living God should be so insulted by men and bear the suffering and reproach and rejection of the religious leaders and be killed... even if it *did* end in resurrection! Yes, we could certainly focus on the humiliation and exaltation of Christ, that we might understand it

better than Peter does, that we might *not* be like Peter, that we might have in mind the things of God rather than the things of men.

But Jesus takes our meditation further; He connects the dots for us, and compels us to admit that such a confession is no mere head-knowledge; such a theology of the cross versus the theology of glory is no mere theological academic theory... as if we can just pontificate about what the theology of the cross means for Jesus. It's not just about what it means for the Christ; it's also about what it means for those who would follow the Christ.

What does it mean that the Christ – if he is to be the true Christ, the son of the living God – what does it mean that He must not only lay down his life and take it up again, but that He will be hated by men for doing so? – they will reject him, discredit him, lead people to despise him and be ashamed of him, and they will kill him so as to silence him. And it will all happen in vain, but it *will* happen. What does that mean not only for the Christ, but for those who follow Him?

The short answer is that it will mean your salvation. The gospel answer is that it will mean your eternal life... that, because Jesus was willing to endure this for you, because He knew that this is what being the Christ included – “He was despised and

rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” – because Jesus knew that and was willing to set his face to the cross for your salvation *anyway*, it means that your salvation is secure; your sins are atoned for; your redemption is accomplished; you are – as Peter before you – blessed by the Father in heaven to be pointed to this Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Lamb of God who takes upon himself the sin of the world and one day in history cries from His cross, “It is finished.” That’s the gospel answer; that’s the eternal life answer!

But, precisely because this truth of “Christ-rejected-by-men, accepted-by-God” defines your eternal life, therefore it also defines your daily life, for what life is lived ‘forever’ that does *not* include the ‘each day’ of that forever? Your ‘forever’ doesn’t start *then*; it started with your baptism! – “The Lord preserve your coming in and your going out from this time forth and forevermore.” Thus, “eternal life” doesn’t start *then* (in the future); it starts *now*... with your baptism, and each and every day lived in your baptism – “beloved, we are God’s children *now*” - even in this world. And Jesus calls you to consider that: what does it mean that the Christ who goes to the cross and wins for you eternal life, what does it mean that He accomplished that in *this* world, and that those who desire the benefit in “the world to

come” are to follow him in *this* world? – as he has led, so shall we follow.

Does not St Paul, in our epistle reading, speak of a justification that is ours *today*, in this life... not just a justification for the future, for a life not-yet-lived, but a justification that is lived each day we dwell here below: “Through him (our Lord Jesus Christ) we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we *stand*” ... indeed, we don’t just know of it or mentally acknowledge it; we stand in it each day “and (St Paul says) we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.”

That rejoicing may sound like a future-tense rejoicing because the unveiling of God’s glory is only future-tense... but how does Paul speak of it? Does he not speak of living in it today? “We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame” – who can hear those words and think Paul is speaking of an “eternal life not yet lived”? No, he speaks of an eternal life already now lived each day by faith as we await it to be revealed to sight... even if we must live in a world that rejects such reconciliation between God and man, yes, rejects the very Christ who accomplished it all for us in history and now – knowing the world’s rejection of His saving work – calls us to follow where He leads.

In short, he draws a line in the sand... not as if you may choose your salvation, but that you may recognize who is your God! Is it the Christ, or is it the world? (Or, as we hinted at last week – is it Christ the Second Adam, or is it your love for your own Old Adam?) Thus, a line in the sand. It's as if he says,

“If you would be my disciples, have proper expectations of how the ‘forevermore’ is to be lived out in *this* world while you wait for the world to come. The Christ: the world hated, Satan tempted, the fleshly ego sought to destroy. The Christian: will not the world hate? Will not Satan tempt, and Old Adam seek to destroy? So, start with Old Adam and all the ways he is tempted: Drown him daily. Deny yourself; take up your own cross – I’m not asking you to take up mine; mine is the cross of your salvation; yours is the cross of the baptismal life, given you in your baptism, that you may confess in the face of a faithless world, Satan’s temptations, even in the face of your own Old Adam and all his self-serving desires; take up your cross... and, follow me.”

Abraham is given in the Old Testament Reading as illustration of such faithful following. Some would say he ‘made a choice’ to follow God and God blessed him for it. But such is a misunderstanding: God made the covenant; God renamed Abram with a new name, a new identity: “No longer shall your name be Abram... but Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.” There was no proactive choosing on

Abraham's part; he simply acknowledged that he was the LORD's, for the LORD to do with as He saw fit. Such is the following of the faithful. We do not follow in self-merit and self-worth and self-praise. We follow because the Lord has named us, the Lord has adopted us, the Lord has saved us into a new identity... an identity only rightly known by following him. So, we follow, for what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his baptismal life? What can a man give in return for his baptismal life? How can we be re-named, re-identified *in* baptism and not live the life *of* baptism? How can we be so eager for inheritance in the life of the world to come, but be ashamed to live as heirs while we wait for the inheritance to be unveiled?

So, as Jesus says in our text: "For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." *Those* are weighty words; consider them carefully... for they define your daily life as much as they define your eternal life.

Now, as we do weigh them carefully, we always speak of the resulting image in the negative light in which Christ speaks it ("whoever is ashamed of Me, I will be ashamed of him..."), and because Christ speaks of it that way, we ought hear it as a firm warning, a call for self-examination, a gut-check of what we

expect it means to live daily life as beneficiaries of the eternal gospel long hated by this world.

But – even in the season of Lent – it is not incorrect to also speak of this glorious gospel and its inheritance in the *positive* light. At what is Christ here hinting? To what is he pointing us forward:

We live in an age and society that has largely rejected Christ; even much of the so-called Church in our society is ashamed of Him, the image of his saving crucifix, the gifts of His sacraments, His holy Law and eternal promises. Last generation's cultural Christians have given way to this generation's so-called "nones" or "spiritual, but not religious" and the lament echoes its refrain that church doors are being shuttered and church properties are sold left and right. And so, the Church's light flickers as a mere smoldering wick in this generation... constantly pressured to despair, to give up hope, to deny Christ... constantly under threat of being seemingly snuffed out.

But, that which may be seen as small and insignificant still shines brightly in the darkness. In fact, the darker it gets, the brighter true light shines. And, as confessional Lutheran seminaries today turn out young men, smaller in number, but more bold than previous generations... bold enough to forsake the

trivial, surface-level American Christianity of the 20th century in favor of the rich doctrine and sacramental life Christ has given His Church, and as those young men are sent out into congregations ... they go willing to suffer all rather than give up Christ, and thus are willing to teach the exclusivity of Christ and enrich those congregations with Christ's gifts... and, in turn, as those bold and faithful congregations then raise up the next generation to love God's doctrine more than western philosophy and therefore love marriage and children more than atheistic materialism and feminist wokeism and atheistic narcissism... and as those pastors and families joined in unity as congregations gather around the altar of God each week for forgiveness and strength and as they go out and boldly confess Christ in their quiet and peaceable lives willing to give up instant gratification for faithful patience for His timing and to give up the sprint for material wealth in favor of the marathon for eternal wealth at Christ's coming... as the Lord provides all of that for His Church, the Church in the west will rise out of the ash heap of western civilization and the pure gold of Christ's saving doctrine will shine brightly around all the rust, rot and decay of the godless society.

Now, that scene may look and sound so glorious, but you know well it does not happen overnight. The seeds that are planted today and watered tomorrow may not show mature

growth for many years... maybe not in my generation's lifetime... maybe not even before Christ comes again in glory. You and I may live this earthly life always under the societal illusion that the Church is about to be snuffed out and Christ is going to be conquered. Thus, because Christian faith must be practiced in patience, it must learn to see the future glory through the veil of present suffering. It must learn to see the vindication of Christ's return through the shame of Christ's cross.

So then, woe to the one who is ashamed of Christ in this current generation. Take that personally: woe to you if unwilling to take up your cross because you live only for today, for you will be forgotten by Christ just as surely as today is forgotten in the long line of yesterdays.

Instead, with Peter, we confess as those blessed by God with baptismal faith in Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And, if the Son of the only living God, if the Christ promised from fallen Eden to make all things new, the Christ who carried His cross, died for our sins, and reconciled us to God... then no days of earthly shame can rob you of eternal glory.

Consider how the psalm that served as our Introit confessed it:

"You who fear the Lord, trust in the Lord! He is their help and their shield. The Lord has remembered us; he will bless us... He will bless those who fear the Lord, both the small and the

great. [And so?] We will bless the Lord from this time forth
and forevermore. Praise the Lord!

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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February 25, 2024