

## **Preaching for Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd      Pastor Scott Trevithick**

Date: February 28, 2021 Year B 2nd Sunday in Lent

Text: Mark 8:27-38 (I have chosen to expand the reading beyond the Lectionary designation to also include vv. 27-30)

Title: Talking about Messiah

Focus: The tension in the passage revolves around expectations of what it means to be "Messiah." Peter's idea of Messiah differs from Jesus' own. Jesus rebukes and redirects Peter and then Jesus teaches both the disciples and the crowds about what it means to be one who follows this Messiah.

### **Gospel Reading: Mark 8:31-38**

*After Peter confesses his belief that Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus tells his disciples for the first time what is to come. Peter's response indicates that he does not yet understand the way of the cross that Jesus will travel.*

<sup>27</sup>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?" <sup>28</sup>And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." <sup>29</sup>He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." <sup>30</sup>And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

<sup>31</sup>[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. <sup>32</sup>He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup>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."

<sup>34</sup>He 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. <sup>35</sup>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. <sup>36</sup>For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? <sup>37</sup>Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? <sup>38</sup>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."

### **Difficult Conversations**

Have you ever known you needed to have a conversation about a difficult subject with someone important in your life? You knew you have needed to have that conversation, you want to have it, but at the same time you dread it. To be honest with yourself, talking about it—acknowledging it—makes you uncomfortable. You have this tendency to avoid the subject. On the other hand, you know you need to talk about it.

The situation could be . . .

- As a kid and a student, maybe that was talking about your report card with your parents.
- It could be acknowledging a change in an important relationship.
- It could be talking with a person about having differing expectations for each other.
- . . . Job performance with someone at work
- . . . Meeting with your doctor, getting test results, or hearing a medical diagnosis
- . . . Talking about finances
- . . . End of life decisions

In recognition of all kinds of situations like these that we know we need to acknowledge and talk about, but that we would rather avoid than directly address, there's a line that sticks out to me in today's Gospel text from Mark: Referring to Jesus, it says **"He spoke of all this quite openly."**

Jesus was ready to have this kind of difficult conversation, but others were not. Specifically, Peter didn't want to hear it, though we can imagine other disciples felt the same way as he did.

## Talking About Messiah

We're in chapter 8 of Mark. Jesus and the disciples have been walking along—they're approaching Caesarea Philippi, which is a city about 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee and Bethsaida.

As they are nearing the villages on the way, Jesus asks them, "Who do people say that I am?" He wants to know what the people are saying about him and who they believe him to be.

The answers are flattering: a prophet; even Elijah, the greatest of prophets; John the Baptist, the greatest recent prophet. These are figures of great authority and power.

Then Jesus asks them pointedly, "But who do you say that I am?"

With the time they have spent with him, what they have seen and heard, and how they have seen him with the crowds, what do his own disciples think?

And Peter, true to how we have seen him at other times, is quick to speak up: "You are the messiah."

While Mark is characteristically brief in what he includes, Peter's comments reflect that Jesus is the one sent by God to restore God's people, the one, the heir of David, that the people have long awaited. He is the One, greater than any prophet, who will redeem Israel.

**So, what they have been talking about is Jesus as Messiah.** That's the conversation in this first part of the passage.

As they continued to walk, approaching Caesarea Philippi . . .

“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.<sup>32</sup>**He said all this quite openly.**”

I told you, that’s the phrase that intrigues me. They’re talking about what it means to be Messiah, which includes suffering and rejection and death. The conversation is not difficult for Jesus because “He said all this quite openly. . .” The conversation is difficult for Peter.

## What or Who is the Messiah?

In the preceding section, when Jesus asks, “And who do *you* say that I am?” you might think it was an “A student” response for Peter to say, “You are the Messiah.” Yes, he does respond quickly and clearly, but following his declaration is where the conversation becomes tense.

“Peter took [Jesus] aside and began to rebuke him” (V. 32b).

WOW! *Rebuke* is such a strong word for a strong reaction.

It’s not like Peter was confused and wondered what Jesus meant and asked for clarification. He didn’t respond with something like, “I don’t think that’s a good idea,” but more like “You are completely wrong! That doesn’t make any sense! What the heck are you thinking?”

Think about what Peter had seen and heard over a period of time in the public ministry of Jesus: Up until this point in Mark’s Gospel, there had really only been “success” or “winning” in terms of what Jesus did and how people responded to him.

- Jesus was healing people.
- Crowds were attracted to him—People came to hear him teach and also to bring sick people to him.
- He fed large crowds.
- There were some disputes with religious authorities over what was permitted on the Sabbath, but that may have seemed like a minor thing in light of how strongly the crowds were responding to Jesus.

These observations--the things which Peter witnessed--contributed to how Peter saw Jesus and how he (Peter) defined what it meant to be Messiah. Jesus was winning! He was attracting people. He was teaching, healing, curing, and feeding people. He was attractive and they wanted more of him.

Peter seems to be saying, “Jesus, how can what you say be true? Why would you turn winning into losing? Why would that be what the Messiah would do? How can this happen?”

We don’t know exactly what Peter was thinking, but he wanted no part of what Jesus was saying. He wanted Jesus to come and overpower Roman authorities.

And as strong as Peter's words were to Jesus, Jesus' words in return were just as direct.

<sup>33</sup>But turning and looking at his disciples, [Jesus] rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

Remember, this conversation is about "being Messiah"—it's about who Jesus was and is as God's anointed or chosen one and how he's going to accomplish what it is that God sent him to do.

Peter had some notion that Jesus was going to come in as some conquering hero and kick some Roman behind.

Jesus presented an entirely different model or plan: That God's promised Messiah had come not to conquer and rule but rather to suffer and die.

No wonder Peter rebuked Jesus—because that wasn't Peter's model at all. Peter knew where to look for God and it was in places of strength. This didn't fit for Peter at all.

But from the time of Jesus' incarnation—Jesus coming as a vulnerable child born to unwed, displaced, scared, yet willing Joseph and Mary—to Jesus' willingness to suffer and die—the mystery of God's love is that God chooses to be with us in human brokenness and suffering.

## To Whom is Jesus Speaking?

There is an interesting shift in the audience to whom Jesus is speaking in this passage:

- At that opening of the passage, Jesus is speaking with the 12, the disciples.
  - V. 31: [Jesus] began to teach them [the disciples] that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering. . ."
- Then, Peter responds more one-on-one to Jesus with his protest:
  - "And Peter took [Jesus] aside and began to rebuke him. . ." (v. 32b)
- Jesus, in response, draws the other disciples back into the conversation, as though wanting them, too, to understand what it means to be Messiah:
  - "But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said. . ." (v. 33)
- The next shift is when Jesus turns to the whole crowd:
  - <sup>34</sup>He 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" (v. 34)

It is as though Jesus is turning to us as well, drawing us in as among the others to whom he wants to explain or teach that being Messiah is not about power and strength as commonly exercised, but it is about being present with one another in the brokenness of life and confronting that through the cross.

*This was the primary theme, actually, of last week's sermon, that God doesn't promise us health and wealth or freedom from hardship, but that God will be present with us no matter what we face.*

There's one more thing, too, that Jesus redefines for Peter and for us: It's not just about what it means to be Messiah, but what it means to be one who follows him.

"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (v. 34).

If, surprisingly, God is most clearly and fully present in the suffering and brokenness of the world, then maybe Jesus' call to us to take up our cross might include being honest about our own brokenness and also demonstrating our willingness to enter into the brokenness of others.

If Jesus has said that being Messiah means willingness to bear suffering and brokenness for one another, then following Jesus means a willingness to walk alongside another in the midst of suffering as well. The depth of love that Jesus demonstrated is, as Paul said, that "there is nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:39). Not even hate and darkness and death can defeat the love and light and life of God.

In the cross, God demonstrates that there is no place where God refuses to go in the quest to love and redeem us.

Thanks be to God for a love like that.