

1  
Poor Peter  
United Church of Broomfield  
February 28, 2021

Mark 8:27-38 (The Voice)

<sup>27</sup> As He traveled with His disciples into the villages of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus posed an *important* question to them. “Who do the people say that I am?” <sup>28</sup> They told Him *about the great speculation concerning His identity*. Some of them say *You are* John the Baptist, others say Elijah, while others say one of the prophets of *old*.

<sup>29</sup> “And who do you say that I am?” Peter said, “You are God’s Anointed, *the Liberating King*.” <sup>30</sup> Jesus responded, “Don’t tell anyone. *It is not yet time*.”

<sup>31</sup> And He went on to teach them many things *about Himself*: how the Son of Man would suffer; how He would be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes; how He would be killed; and how, after three days, *God would* raise Him from the dead. <sup>32</sup> He said all these things in front of them all, but Peter took Jesus aside to rebuke Him.

<sup>33</sup> Get behind Me, you tempter! You’re thinking only of human things, not of the things God has planned. <sup>34</sup> He gathered the crowd and His disciples alike. If any one of you wants to follow Me, you will have to give yourself up to God’s plan, take up your cross, and do as I do. <sup>35</sup> For any one of you who wants to be rescued will lose your life, but any one of you who loses your life for My sake and for the sake of this good news will be liberated. <sup>36</sup> Really, what profit is there for you to gain the whole world and lose yourself *in the process*? <sup>37</sup> What can you give in exchange for your life? <sup>38</sup> If you are ashamed of Me and of what I came to teach to this adulterous and sinful generation, then the Son of Man will be ashamed of you when He comes in the glory of His Father along with the holy messengers *at the final judgment*.

\*\*\*\*

My heart goes out to Peter. He has such good intentions. Peter’s the disciple that goes all-out, never seeming to say or do anything modestly or minimally. He is passionate in what he says and does.

We can tell that Peter loves Jesus, believes in him and the ministry that he is doing. When asked, he immediately left his fishing nets and leaves everything to follow Jesus. At the transfiguration, he is so moved that he wants to build “dwellings so they can stay up there and bank in that wonderful feeling.”<sup>1</sup> He wants the feeling, the experience to last forever. Peter’s heart and passion are so great that he is venerated as the first Pope of Rome and when he was also crucified like Jesus, but upside down. He comes across in extremes.

As Peter journeys with Jesus, he somehow just can’t get beyond himself. Despite his passion, devotion and all of those good intentions, he still, somehow, screws things up, sticks his foot in his mouth, misunderstands and does the wrong thing. Peter is most famous for denying Jesus; at the last supper Jesus predicts Peter’s denial and Peter is steadfast that such a thing would never, ever happen. He is hurt that Jesus would even think such a thing – “Lord, maybe everyone else will trip and fall tonight, but I will not. I’ll be beside You. I won’t falter.” And what happens, Peter doesn’t just deny Jesus, he denies him repeatedly, three times getting progressively more and more adamant, “I tell you; I do not know that man!”

---

<sup>1</sup> Dana, MaryAnn McKibben. Christian Century. *Living by the Word*, pg. 23.

Peter's heart, passion and naivete are present in today's passage. He had great hopes for Jesus' future. When Jesus was traveling with his friends up north to a place called Caesarea Philippi, he asked the question, "Who do people say that I am?" Several of the disciples answered by saying what they had heard from various people who had listened to Jesus. "John the Baptist," said one. "Elijah," said another. Others said that some people were calling him a prophet and so on.

It was then Jesus put the question to the disciples themselves. "But who do YOU say that I am?" It was Peter who volunteered the answer, "You are the Messiah," he said. Jesus did not deny it, but he asked them "not to tell anyone" at that time. In fact, Mark writes that Jesus "sternly ordered them not to tell anyone." Apparently, Jesus decided that who he was and what he was about should wait to be revealed as more of his future unfolded. The revelation would come in God's good time, not immediately.

Peter obviously had some ideas about what he himself wanted to take place ... and soon. If Jesus was indeed the Messiah, an anointed, liberating King, then Peter could envision the Lord beginning to make major moves toward showing his Messiahship. No doubt Peter wanted him to assume the role of God's Anointed and become the powerful leader of the Jews. He surely felt that the Messiah would drive out the oppressive Romans then ruling the Promised Land. The Messiah would defeat all enemies of the Jews, would provide justice in the land and the general welfare of the Jewish nation. Peter envisioned a great and glorious future for Jesus the Messiah, the person to whom he had attached himself and for whom he had left family, home and work.

\*\*\*\*

But right then and there, Jesus began to teach his followers something quite different. Rather than becoming a triumphant hero, Jesus would be facing great suffering, he told them. Many prominent leaders of his own people would reject him: the Pharisees and Sadducees, the chief priests and scribes. Jesus went on to shock his friends by saying that he would be killed. Yes. Actually slain. They would see him die.

Imagine the revulsion, the jolt that surged through his followers. The stunned Peter would have nothing to do with such talk from the one he so admired. He took Jesus aside, probably trying to stop him from any more shocking talk, and actually started to lecture his friend. Mark says "Peter ... began to rebuke him."

Well, Jesus repelled Peter immediately. Speaking out loud so that all could hear, Jesus said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." Think about those words. **"You are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."** Those were stunning, stinging words aimed at the big fisherman, but they were words he needed to hear. And I suspect that they are words we often need to hear also, isn't it true? I think that's why I empathize and feel sorry for Peter – because in him I can see myself a little bit.

Our main focus is upon the marvelous dreams and hopes we have for our loved ones and ourselves? And what can be wrong with that? An argument can well be made that we should have great hopes and visions for ourselves and our family members and friends. Surely there is nothing wrong and everything right with setting a goal to strive for, and to try to make happen. There is only one caveat, one warning we should heed. Our dreams need to be in line with the plan God has for us. If they are not, in spite of whatever we might achieve, there will always be a feeling of something missing, something not quite right, achievement without inner joy.

\*\*\*\*

There is a story of a man who did not come from a family of wealth nor high social standing. However, the man was a hard worker and became very successful. He built a small business into a very large company. The man worshiped regularly in his church. He gave generously to it and to other worthy causes. Sadly, however, he began to use his company's money as if it were his own to use as he pleased. He strived mightily to gain the high social standing he never had. He spent money, other peoples' money, outrageously. He bought well-known paintings by famous artists. He purchased several homes around the globe, each furnished with the finest of everything. He joined the most expensive clubs, golfed with the rich and famous and so forth.

In due time, he achieved his dream, he built his utopia. But eventually it began to turn to ashes, all crumbling in front of his eyes. He was arrested and put on trial for misappropriating funds from the company he once led successfully.

Sometime in the past he began to set his mind on human things, not on divine things. A statement found in the book of Proverbs seems most fitting for him and for others whose focus is only on human things: "Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit, but righteousness delivers from death" [Proverbs 10:2].

\*\*\*\*

God wants us to choose carefully where we focus our minds. When Peter rebuked Jesus, Peter was focusing on his desire that Jesus be the militant and powerful ruler who would set things right in the world. He misunderstood what **God's** intention of the Messiah was and how he would ultimately bring forth God's kingdom. Jesus was intent on following the divine plan, the leadership of God into the future, whatever the future held. Even when it appeared to be greatly frightening. Even if a cross was before him.

While Peter probably felt deeply hurt in that moment, there was a great lesson to be learned...for him and for us. It requires that we prayer and work hard to understand what and who the Messiah *really is*. It also requires that we understand suffering and what Jesus means in telling us to "take up our crosses."

When you and I make choices, ***in the HOW we take up our crosses***, when we truly seek the mind of God as we travel on life's road, we will find that we can handle whatever comes, even death itself. But if we decide instead to center on human things -- on the temporary rather than the everlasting -- we will find ourselves heading for unimaginable trouble. Sometimes we may discover our life totally out of control and in a desperate condition.

\*\*\*\*

Our lives are truly fruitful and meaningful as we center on the will of God. God redefined Messiah. Instead of a violent warrior, God's Messiah came forth in peace, advocating for the oppressed & the forgotten and committing his life to bringing about God's love, grace and mercy ***for all***. **God reimagined suffering**. Instead of pain for the sake of feeling hurt, both physically and psychological, God's suffering is taught to us paradoxically, as the joy felt in thinking of others first, in putting creation's survival and flourishing above ourselves, and taking action to care for those for whom are uncared.

God knows where we are to go, what we are to be, what we need to do to find abundant and fulfilling lives. Consequently, we need, as we go from day to day, to develop a pattern of seeking the mind of God regarding each choice we must make. Sometimes, like Peter, we need to be shocked and feel the sting of being re-centered in the mind of Christ.

We would do well to follow something like the guidelines for daily Christian living developed by the Trappist Monks in the Abbey of the Genesee. It reads as follows:

*This is the beginning of a new day. God has given me this day to use as I will. I can waste it or use it for good. What I do today is important because I'm exchanging a day of my life for it. When tomorrow comes, this day will be gone forever, leaving in its place something I have traded for it. I want it to be gain, not loss; good, not evil; success, not failure; in order that I shall not regret the price I paid for it.*

Let's not feel sorry for Peter. You and I are free to live our lives as we please, even free to wreck them, if we choose. But those who are spiritually wise know that the precious gift of a free will is only truly meaningful and joyous when we surrender completely, day by day, to the One who knows best how our lives are meant to be lived. Lord, may we continually dedicate ourselves to re-learning, re-understanding and re-committing our lives for the suffering Messiah.

AMEN