

Mark 8:31-38

Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection

Then he 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. ³² He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ 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.”

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

Say it Ain't So, Jesus!

In churches that take liturgy seriously, we say “Thanks be to God” after we hear the scriptures read aloud.

- ❖ Now because I spend more time sitting with you than I spend up here in front of you, I will tell you that, after hearing hard passages like today’s “Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me,” I feel like it would be more appropriate to say, “*Thanks* be to God?” instead.
- ❖ That’s what’s going on in today’s Gospel reading ... Jesus sounds harsh, but is telling us that the way to safety goes through danger.

Mark’s Gospel is a quick read ... I’ve even heard it performed from memory in about 90 minutes ...

In Mark’s Gospel, we meet a spirit-driven Jesus ...

- ❖ preaching and teaching that we need to turn our lives around because the Kingdom of God is coming ...
- ❖ always on the go ... casting out demons ... healing ... working miracles ...
- ❖ and calling disciples

This passage comes at the halfway point of Mark’s Gospel, just after Peter has blurted out “You are the Messiah.”

Here, Jesus delivers tragic news as he makes the first of three predictions that he must and will suffer and die.

❖ Peter reacts like you or I would in the face of tragic news ...

- Shocked, he goes into denial: “Say it Ain’t So, Jesus!”
- Or maybe he has a case of shattered expectations: “That’s not the kind of Messiah I was expecting!”

Jesus comes back, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

❖ Is Jesus accusing Peter of evil intentions? I don’t think so ...

- The name “Satan” in the Old Testament means “accuser” or “distractor” ...
- It’s more like, “Don’t distract me ... I’m on a mission from God.”

Then he turns to the crowd and tells them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

- ❖ That’s what we’re doing in Lent ... following Jesus as he moves towards the cross.
- ❖ The command to deny ourselves has led the church to the practice of “giving up” something for Lent.

But there is more ...

- ❖ The world can be a dangerous and tragic place, and our own efforts to make it better only end up making things worse.
- ❖ Jesus is saying we have to give up the notion that we can get to the resurrection without the sacrifice of the cross.
- ❖ That we have to put our notions aside and trust Jesus as he accomplishes mission.
- ❖ What distracts us from following Jesus? Or from accepting God's love?

Even by the end of Mark's Gospel, the disciples are not much better at denying themselves, taking up their crosses and following Jesus ...

But Lent is not about us, anyway ... it's a time when God softens hard hearts with self-giving love ... so that we can let go of our schemes for saving the world, even if we only follow from a distance.

Thanks be to God!