

## 28<sup>th</sup> February 2021 – LENT 2– Chris’s Sermon.

Mark 8:31-38

In our Gospel today, Jesus talks to the disciples about his ministry – he talks about a ministry of service and sacrifice that would lead him all the way to the cross – he reminds them that ministry is sacrificial. He doesn’t talk about personal glory and power – he doesn’t talk about riches and reward. Instead, he talks about a faithful ministry that is intensely demanding – a ministry that many will reject. He talks about his own pain and suffering, as their teacher and leader.

And, for the disciples this is a very challenging message. The disciples who are called to follow in their master’s footsteps, become quite disturbed. Peter, in particular, doesn’t want to hear this message. (And, I think that’s quite reasonable – who would?) Peter was hoping for a different message - a different outcome – perhaps he was hoping for glory and reward. And, of course, he loves Jesus. He doesn’t want to see his teacher and friend suffer – he doesn’t want to see his Lord rejected and killed.

Peter wasn’t ready for this message – he wasn’t ready to carry the words of Jesus in his heart. Peter and the disciples were still holding onto something else.

In our Gospel reading we’re shown a ministry that’s not attractive – a ministry that doesn’t appear to have many rewards – a ministry that lies beyond our hopes and dreams and expectations. Today, we’re shown a Messiah who challenges us and suffers with us – a Messiah who calls us to question our comfortable faith – a faith that can, at times, be a little self-serving.

I’m reminded of some words written Thomas Merton, who lived and served as a Trappist Monk in the 1940’s and 50’s. In his life, he encouraged dialogue and greater understanding between the great faith traditions in the world. Thomas Merton reminds us that love is the great common denominator – he talks about love as the great truth that defines us - our true destiny in life.

In the words of Merton, “...we do not find meaning in life by ourselves alone – we find it with one another. We do not discover the secret of our lives by study and calculation in our own isolated meditations. The meaning of our life is a secret that has to be revealed to us in love, by the one we love. And, if this love is unreal, the secret will never be found. We will never be fully real until we let ourselves fall in love – either with another human being or with God...”

Consider the words of Psalm 51 – which talk about this longing to be changed and transformed by love, “...Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right Spirit within me...”

As we continue our journey through lent, we pause to give consideration to our calling. Are we like the people who were drawn to Jesus - the followers of Christ who were looking for a prophet to lead them and liberate them? Are we like the disciples, who were looking for a teacher who would lead them into a comfortable ministry of service – a ministry without hardship or pain – a ministry without suffering.

Are we like Peter, who rebuked Jesus when he talked about his suffering and death? (A messenger sent by God – a messenger who suffers and dies – is this the God we are called to follow?)

Like the disciples, we travel with Jesus. As Christians, we eat with him and listen to his words. But, are we ready to accept this suffering Lord – are we ready to follow (as an act of love and longing) – are we ready to pick up our cross and follow?

Like the disciples, at time we will struggle with this faith. At times, our belief and hopes and comforts will get in the way. Like the disciples, we too will be tempted to turn away when we are confronted by this wounded healer.

In a way, Lent reminds us of this calling. In particular, the discipline of prayer and fasting and study remind us that we have a responsibility to those we are called to serve. This is the purpose of Lent – this is the purpose of our time in the wilderness – to redirect.

Beyond our self-interest and our limited understanding, we too can catch a glimpse of the true Jesus – if we are daring (if we are led by love). “...those who want to save their life will lose it; and those who lose their life for the sake of the Gospel will save it...”

Today we are reminded that Jesus is our suffering Messiah – the one who calls us to follow – a God of love and compassion and sacrifice – our compass when we lose sight of our calling – our guide when we stray from the path. In Christ, we see more than just a liberator – we see the freedom to love and serve God and each other.

Today, we are shown that this is the path to true liberation and freedom. This is what it means to truly see and serve our wounded healer. We are called to use this time of Lent to truly become the people that God intends us to be.

In the words of our collect, “God of all times and places, you opened for us the path to eternal life: grant that being born of water and the Spirit, we may joyfully serve you in newness of life and faithfully walk in your holy ways, through Jesus Christ our Lord...”

The Lord be with you.