

Second Sunday in Lent – March 1, 2015
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

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Mark 8:31-38 (NIV)

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. 32) He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33) But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. **"You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."** 34) Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35) For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. 36) What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? 37) Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? 38) If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

Dear friends in Christ:

While disciplining a child the disappointed parent asks, "Just what in the world were you thinking when you did that?" The words may sound harsh and severe especially to the child – but true and proper discipline isn't a tongue lashing – it's a loving attempt to disciple or to lead to an understanding of what's right and wrong. We have an example of this kind of harsh but loving discipline in the rebuke Jesus spoke to Peter in our text for today.

Before we take a closer look at this text though; it's important for us to understand what had taken place just before Jesus began to teach his disciples **that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and teachers of the law and that must be killed and after three days rise again.**

Jesus had been talking with his disciples about himself as he was traveling with his disciples in the region of Caesarea Philippi following his miraculous restoration of the sight of a blind man from Bethsaida. This miracle like all of the other miracles of Jesus gave testimony to Jesus divinity – and it got the people talking. After they left that place Jesus asked his disciples (Mark 8:27-29 NIV) **"Who do people say I am?" (28) They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." (29) "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Messiah."**

Jesus acknowledged that they were correct in saying he was the Messiah (or the Christ) but he knew that they some wrong ideas about the Christ and he wanted to set them straight. Jesus also knew that he would not have much more time left with them so his teaching would have to be clear and straight to the point.

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. 32) He spoke plainly about this...

It was at this point that Peter pulled Jesus aside and rebuked him. "Jesus, what are you thinking, what are you talking about," Peter wanted to know. Surely if you really are the Christ – the elders, chief priests and teachers of law would be willing to welcome you with open arms. They would do everything in their power to see to it that Jesus would be able to succeed in the over throw of their enemies. What's all this talk about being killed? What good is a dead Christ Peter wanted to know?

A good student or disciple doesn't jump to conclusions. He waits to react until he has heard and thought about everything the teacher has to say. Peter wasn't a very good student – he began to form his opinion before Jesus had even finished speaking – he heard nothing about Jesus' resurrection.

No doubt Peter thought he was doing Jesus a favor – that he was assuring him of his support when he took Jesus aside and rebuked him saying: (Matthew 16:22 NIV) **"Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"**

No doubt, Jesus response to Peter, spoken so all could hear, must have come as a complete shock to him. **When Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."**

Once again, Jesus lays it on the line – clearly and emphatically! He had come into this world to crush Satan's head, to undo the effects of sin and to defeat death. Already at the very beginning of his ministry Jesus knew and understood that his rescue mission would take him to the cross. He told Nicodemus: (John 3:14-16 NIV) **Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15) that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him." 16) For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.**

That was God's plan – a plan which would remove the curse of sin – by having Jesus become a curse for us as the apostle Paul reminds us: (Galatians 3:13 NIV) **Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole."**

By opposing that plan Peter was playing the role of Satan – he was standing in the way of his own salvation because his focus was not on things spiritual but on material things. He was thinking like a man and not like God. He was thinking about the present, the here and now rather than the future and the hereafter.

It's no wonder Jesus had to put Peter in his place. It was for his good and for ours that Jesus pointed out that he had in mind the things of men rather than the things of God. I suppose it's easy for us to wonder how Peter could in the course of less than a few hours make a bold confession of Christ and then turn around and champion the Devil's cause. But rather than point fingers at Peter it would be appropriate for us to examine our own lives to discover where our thoughts are directed?

Theme: What do you have in mind?

1. The things of men?
2. The things of God?

Jesus will help us as we seek to answer this question by teaching us the meaning of following him. **Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me..."**

Peter, the disciples and those in the crowds that followed Jesus – often had in mind the things of men when it came to their ideas about the Messiah or the Christ. When the Christ would come they would enjoy peace and prosperity and blessings galore. That idea is still prevalent today among many who believe that those who follow Christ will enjoy abundant blessings in this world. How different things are when we begin to think about the things (truths of God). Self denial stands in sharp contrast to "I want it all" mentality so commonly found in our culture today. Taking up a cross stands in sharp contrast to the life of ease and pleasure which is the goal of so many. Follow me – that also stands in sharp contrast to the worldly view that "I can do it myself."

Let's take a close look at Jesus' words. **"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves..."** Another way to phrase that would be to say that we need to lose sight of ourselves and our own interests. It's not, me first but Christ first. Jesus provides the perfect example of self-denial. The apostle Paul describes what Jesus has done for us in this way: (2 Corinthians 8:9 NIV) **For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.**

Paul is making an application of Jesus' words about denying self when he reminds the Philippians, (Philippians 2:5-8 NIV) **In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: 6) Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; 7) rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8) And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death-- even death on a cross!**

Jesus' self-sacrificing love is what motivates us to set aside self and to be found in him. Jesus has more to say about this way of thinking later in our text as he seeks to remind us of the foolishness of having in mind only the things of men. **What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? 37) Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?**

No matter how much earthly wealth, glory and fame we might be able to accumulate – we would never be able to accumulate enough to purchase eternal life for our souls. Jesus alone was able to pay the price to rescue our souls from eternal condemnation. His perfect life and his innocent sufferings and death have set us free from sin, death and the power of the devil. We have been redeemed so that we can be his own and live under him in his kingdom and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he has risen from the dead and lives and rules eternally.

As we ponder the tremendous value of our soul and its eternal welfare and the tremendous sacrifice of our Savior to win it for all eternity it will become obvious to us that nothing this world has to offer is worth hanging on to if it means turning away from Christ. That helps us to put Jesus' words about denying self into perspective and helps us to have in mind the things of God.

Now let's move on to Jesus' next command: **"Whoever wants to be my disciple must...take up their cross and follow me."** This phrase of Jesus is well known, but I fear it may not often be understood the way Jesus meant it. What do you have in mind when you think of the crosses that you must bear? Do you have in mind the things of God or the things of men?

I often hear people refer to the hardships or burdens that come into their lives as a cross they have to bear. Jesus has something other than the day-to-day difficulties that we face in mind when he speaks of bearing our crosses for him. The cross that Jesus carried was an instrument of shame. Hebrews 12:2-3, helps us put Jesus words into perspective: **[Let us fix] our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (3) Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.** Jesus willingly set aside his own glory and the riches of heaven and became obedient to death on cross for our sake. What was it that motivated him to do this for miserable sinners such as ourselves who all too often are concerned only with our own comforts? It certainly was his great love but it was also the joy of knowing that we would be able to join him in the glories of heaven that enabled him to think nothing at all about the shame and disgrace of the cross.

By the same token then we are able to count it pure joy when ever we face trials and shame of any kind as a result of our relationship with Christ Jesus. Therefore we will gladly bear any shame that might be heaped upon us because we are Christians – counting that shame as a cross we will take up as we follow Christ.

Jesus said, "**Whoever wants to be my disciple must...take up their cross and follow me.**" Keep on following me. Because our hearts have been set free from sin by Christ, we will indeed willingly deny ourselves, carry our crosses for Jesus sake and willingly follow him – gladly seeking to learn of him and his will, gladly accepting and living according to that will even to the point of giving up our lives for him if we are called upon to do that.

The very thought of being ashamed of Jesus would have been totally foreign to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden before the fall into sin. That reality changed when sin entered the world. Now we live in an adulterous and sinful generation. Jesus said: **If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.**

Jesus chose his words carefully. He is the bridegroom and the church is his bride – that's how the Scriptures frequently picture our relationship to Christ. In the OT times the Lord's prophets often accused God's people of spiritual adultery when they prostituted themselves with the heathen gods and idols of the nations around them. They loved the world more than they loved the Lord. They were more concerned with the praise of men than the praise of the Lord.

As Christians our focus will be on the blessings of our marriage to Christ rather than on the so called beauties and attractions of this sinful world. We will keep our eyes focused on the joy which is before us when the Savior will come in all his glory – gladly paying attention to his words and putting them into practice in our lives. Together with the Apostle Paul we will declare, (Romans 1:16 NIV) **I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes...**

The hymn writer captured the thought of the Christian quite well: CW -- 347

1) Jesus! and shall it ever be
A mortal man ashamed of thee?
Ashamed of thee, whom angels praise,
Whose glories shine through endless days?

4) Ashamed of Jesus? Yes, I may
When I've no guilt to wash away,
No tear to wipe, no good to crave,
No fear to quell, no soul to save.

3) Ashamed of Jesus, that dear friend
On whom my hopes of heav'n depend?
No; when I blush, be this my shame,
That I no more revere his name.

5) Till then -- nor is my boasting vain
Till then I boast a Savior slain;
And oh, may this my glory be:
That Christ is not ashamed of me.

May the Lord Jesus enable us to set aside the thoughts of men and gladly hang on to the mind of God as we await his glorious return. Amen.