

Second Sunday of Lent, Year B  
Mark 8:31-38  
March 4, 2012

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Last week we listened as the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness where Satan tempted Him. And in verse 29, just 2 verses prior to our passage this morning Mark informs us Jesus asked the disciples, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Messiah.” They have watched him feed thousands, heal the sick and lame, cast aside demonic spirits, and even walk on water. These are great feats of power the likes only God is capable of. Perhaps, they are beginning to understand who Jesus is and what he has come to do.

But then we come to our assigned passage this morning. Just as soon as it looked like they may have begun to grasp Jesus’ true identity, Mark reveals they still do not understand who Jesus truly is and what His mission is all about as Peter rebukes the Son of Man. Living in light of the resurrection it is much simpler for us to grasp Jesus’ teaching, as we know how the story ends. However, to fully understand Peter we have to view this text through his lenses and enter the story. We remember Peter, like Jesus, was part of the Jewish community who had been expecting the Messiah, the heir to the throne of David God promised. After finally grasping Jesus as Messiah they thought they had it all figured out. Jesus, the long awaited King was finally here, and was going to set things right and take over the throne making life better. But then He turns things upside down stating, “I am going to suffer and die!”

In an instant I imagine the disciples' hope was gone. The Messiah isn't supposed to die. On the contrary, He is to become ruler and change things freeing them from Roman oppression. Clearly, the disciple's eyes and ears could only fixate on things of the flesh such as what Jesus was going to do for them to make their life better. So, Peter did the only thing he could think of – probably what the other disciples were thinking and probably what we would have been thinking if we were present. He pulled Jesus aside and rebuked Him. His preconceived notion of what the Messiah was supposed to be did not match what Jesus just told him. Jesus rebukes back telling Peter to “Get behind me, Satan,” and then goes on to teach what true discipleship means stating, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” While this is a new teaching to the disciples it certainly isn't for the church today as Jesus teaches often discipleship is not going to be easy; in fact, the way of the cross may lead to death just as it did for Jesus. Certainly persecution was a reality for the disciples, early Christians and sadly for many Christians worldwide yet today. In a study done in 2016, 215 million people around the globe experienced high, very high, or extreme persecution, which is defined as “any hostility experienced as a result of one's identification with Christ.” This is a cross most of us probably never had, nor ever will, be called upon to bear.

So how do we interpret this today? In our context as disciples' of Christ. What does “carrying our crosses” mean? What does losing our life for Jesus' sake, and for the sake of the gospel, in order to save our life mean? This is one of those passages with

many meanings and many possible interpretations. Will we literally lose our life for Jesus? Well, in some situations, that is absolutely the case. People continue today to be martyred for the sake of Christ and his gospel of good news. We know that in death there will be life. Eternal life through Christ. This is gospel news. Good news. But is there something more Jesus is getting at here? The answer is yes. A non-literal reading of the passage might quite simply be one that says it's not about us. It's about God and specifically what God is doing in Jesus Christ. Saving our lives and the lives of the world through his cross and resurrection. Life is found in losing ourselves in Christ. His mission. When we relinquish control over those things that we cling to for life, Jesus says we will find life. Life in him. When we get behind him and follow his way of entering into the suffering of the world, meeting people where they are at and loving as God loves which, as we see in Christ, is a love that gives for the sake of the other; ultimately, we find life here and now. Yet, this is a hard concept to grasp. What is this new life? What does it look like?

I came across a story this week and I don't know if it is a true story or not. Nor, does it tell us if the two people in the story are Christian or not; however, I do believe it is a portrait of what Jesus is hinting at in our text. One of the characters in the story explains 20 years ago he was a taxi cab driver who was called to pick up someone in the middle of the night. Upon arrival, he found himself outside a dark building with only a single light on in a ground floor unit. Many drivers would have honked once or twice and then left if there was no response. Yet, aware many impoverished people relied upon

taxis as their only means of transportation and sensing this situation posed no danger he got out and went to the door and knocked as the person on the other side may be someone who needed his assistance. From behind the door came a frail, elderly voice that stated, "Just a minute" and then he heard the sound of something being dragged across the floor. Finally, after a long pause the door opened and a small woman in her 80's stood before him with a small suitcase. She asked if he would take her suitcase, which he did and placed it in the cab and then returned to assist the woman down off the curb and into the car. Once in the car the elderly woman gave him an address and then asked if they could drive through downtown. This was not the quickest route to her destination the cab driver explained and thus would make the trip more costly; but, the woman indicated she was in no hurry and explained she was on her way to hospice. She didn't have any family left and the doctor had told her she didn't have much time left. This, more than likely, would be her last ride and she wanted to savor it. The cab driver quietly reached over and shut off the meter and asked the frail woman in the backseat what route she would like to take and for the next two hours they drove through the city and she showed him the building she had once worked in, the neighborhood she and her husband had lived in, and even the furniture warehouse that had once been a ballroom where she had gone dancing as a girl. At other times, she would simply sit in the backseat saying nothing and her eyes glistening with tears. As the sun began to crease over the horizon she suddenly said, "I'm tired. Let's go now." They drove to the hospice facility and she asked what she owed for the ride. The cab driver said nothing.

She said that he had to make a living but he replied that there were other passengers and with that he squeezed her hand and the door shut. It was the sound of the closing of a life. That driver didn't pick up any more passengers that shift but rather drove around aimlessly lost in thought until he came to the understanding he didn't think he had done anything more important in his life than what he just experienced. A routine call in the middle of the night that caught him utterly by surprise and it appears gave him life in the face of death. A beautifully wrapped moment he cherished 20 years later.<sup>i</sup>

It would have been all too easy for that driver to honk and take off. Or simply take the quickest route in order to return home in the middle of the night. Or not to engage the woman in conversation and miss out on something so special. But he didn't do that and look what he experienced.

Could this be what Jesus alludes to in our passage? Those moments of life when we journey with others in their pain and suffering. Those beautifully wrapped gifts of grace and joy when we give into our own fears, desires, and wants and instead follow Jesus to meet the world where it is. Meet people where they are and do our best to share the love of Christ with them and bring resurrection hope to them. In so doing, it may ultimately be us that finds life and are met by the risen Christ. In proclaiming the gospel we receive the gospel of grace. We experience the love of Christ. We experience life. New life. Resurrection life.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.weboflove.org/060309cabride>