

Dear Friends in Christ:

On September 15, our gospel text will be the account in Mark 8 where Jesus asks his disciples "...who do you say that I am?" The question sets the disciples to scrambling until Peter pipes up and says, "You are the Messiah." We could leave it at that: a fitting title for Jesus—perhaps the most fitting title for Jesus. Who is more worthy to be King? Who better to lead God's people—indeed all people? Who better to call the shots? Who better to protect the innocent from the ruthless and provide for the common good? Jesus makes a fine King indeed.

The problem is that Jesus hears the confession of St. Peter: "You are the Messiah," and affirms it, but then he proceeds to blow it up by saying it is necessary for the Messiah to be handed over to sinners and suffer and die and be buried and on the third day be raised from the dead.

Peter is naturally very concerned about such talk. He and the other disciples have big plans involving glory and honor and prestige and power as Jesus' wingmen. He wants to squelch this kind of thinking: to nip it in the bud. He confronts Jesus, but Jesus doubles down:

**He called the crowd with his disciples and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."**

Faithfulness to the Messiah will necessarily involve suffering and misunderstanding and ridicule and rejection and attempts by the powers that be to neutralize the faithful followers of Jesus. One of the Berrigan brothers famously said, "If you want to be a Christian in this day and age, you had better look good on wood." One could easily expand that to say that according to Jesus. "If you want to be a Christian in any day and age, you had better look good on wood."

When Jesus proclaims the arrival of the Kingdom of God, his is in effect saying that God is repossessing the world. This ought to be good news of great joy to all the people, but instead, many find that their little fiefdoms and cubbyholes and carveouts and circles of influence will be negatively impacted if God takes things back. So they choose to push back.

This is one of the blind spots of evangelicalism. The operating assumption is that nonChristians are the way they are because they have not heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ. One could just as easily assume that nonChristians are the way they are because having heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ, they have embraced a gospel of personal empowerment instead. It is not so much a problem of ignorance, but a problem of willfulness. Certainly both types of people are out there.

God's response to all of this is to let things run their course for the foreseeable future. If pushback happens, it happens. If intellectuals mock Christian values, then mocking happens. If terrorists murder Christians, then murder happens. If governments persecute Christians, persecution happens. If crucifixions happen, they happen. As we move into October and November, we begin to have texts about the end times and the final judgement. It is not that God cannot see. It is not that God cannot act. What God will do is delayed until God judges the world in righteousness. We do not know when that will be. Perhaps God is waiting for more people to hear the Gospel. Jesus tells us that only the Father knows when the judgement will be. When God judges the world, then the present evil age is brought to a close and the new creation springs forth from God. Then, as Julian of Norwich put it, "All will be well. All will be well. All manner of thing will be well."

Yours in Christ,

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