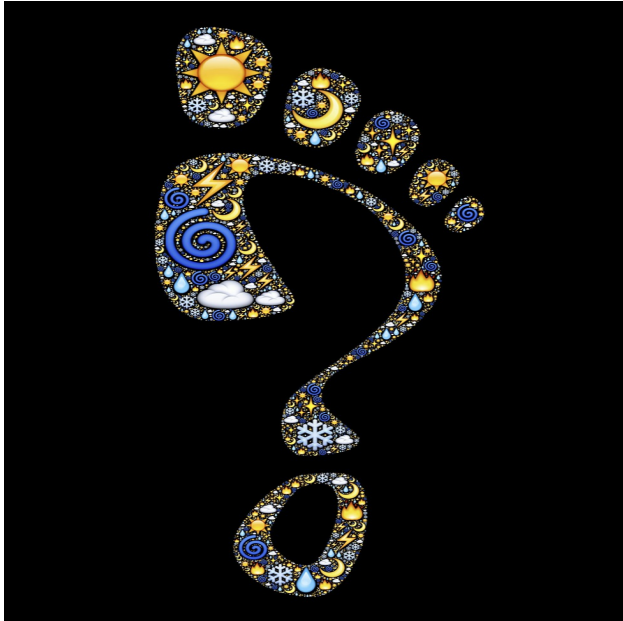


Sermon by Vicki Kakonis
Based on Mark Chapter 8, verses 27-38
*“The most important question in the world” Or
“Peter’s not-so-great confession”*



In today’s Gospel, Jesus tells Peter that whoever wants to follow in his footsteps has to answer some hard questions. Is he willing to suffer? Is he thinking about what Peter wants, or what God wants? True Discipleship is found in the words of verse 34, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

Jesus often teaches through questions. When He asks, “who do the people think I am?”, their response was at least rooted in Biblical terms. They looked back to the Old Testament and

responded with the names of Prophets: John the Baptist, Elijah and Jeremiah.

In Deuteronomy 18:15, Moses said, “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him.”

The prophets would all speak about doom and gloom, the coming wrath of God. The people were hoping that Jesus would come and clean house by destroying the Roman Empire. God had brought down many empires in the Old Testament, why wouldn’t this be the same?

Everyone was pondering this question: “Who is Jesus?” Herod thought He was John the Baptist raised from the dead. The People from His hometown of Nazareth heard Him in the synagogue. Mark 6:2-6 tells us, “When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed.”

“Where did this man get these things?” they asked. “What’s this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles! Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us? And they took offense at him.”

Jesus said to them, "**Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor.**" He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their lack of faith.

Jewish religious leaders thought that Jesus' works came from the power of Satan because He would break their laws and traditions. It was only the demons who knew who He really was and Jesus commanded them to be quiet.

So, what about the disciples, who did they think He was? Mark 8:29-30 tells us Jesus said, "But what about you?" He asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Messiah." And then Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

Why wouldn't Jesus want everyone to know that He is the Messiah? Why wouldn't He want His disciples to spread the word?

One answer is that the people did not understand what the work of the Messiah was. He did not want to fuel a revolution; He was not sent to bring down their enemies, but to suffer and die for our sins.

This is when Peter rebukes Him. Jesus spoke plainly about this so Peter understood and he took Jesus aside to set Him straight. Imagine, taking Jesus by the arm and leading him off to the side to straighten Him out. Peter is opposing the atoning work of Jesus!

I don't think Peter was ready for what Jesus had to say next in verse 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.'"

Wow! Let that sink in. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

Now it is quite clear why Jesus did not want the disciples to tell anyone that He was the Messiah. Peter was resistant to Jesus' words. He had a selfish point of view and was putting his self-interest first. Peter was resisting our LORD and speaking Satan's words. He was not following Jesus, but trying to lead Him. That's never a good idea.

First you have Peter declaring to the Lord, “You are the Messiah”, immediately followed by Jesus’ first prediction of His death. What an extraordinary contrast of events. They both had to be upset and confused. How could Christ die? The Messiah was expected to lead Israel into a new age of freedom and power. But Jesus made it clear their trust had to be focused on him, not on the current popular expectations of the Messiah’s mission.

Jesus was focused on His mission and used the title “The Son of Man.” This title especially suited Jesus’ total mission. It was free of political connotations, thus preventing false expectations. It combined the elements of suffering and glory in a way no other designation could.

True Discipleship is found in the words of verse 34, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

Cross-bearing was not an established Jewish metaphor. “To take-up one’s cross” was to demonstrate publicly one’s submission/obedience to the authority against which you previously rebelled.

Jesus tells us that defilement comes from within in v. 36-38, “What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? 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.”

We have a choice, to believe and follow Jesus...or to be “ashamed” of Jesus and reject Him and retain allegiance to “this generation,” because of disbelief and fear of the world’s contempt.

Lord, help us to bear our cross in obedience to your son, Jesus Christ. Amen

Vicki Kakonis

Foot notes

Definitions: To be ashamed - is to deny
To be adulterous - is to be spiritually unfaithful

Inspiration from Max Lucado:

The pole of power is greasy. The roman emperor Charlemagne knew that. An interesting story surrounds the burial of this famous king. Legend has it that he asked to be entombed sitting right in his throne. He asked that his crown be placed on his head and his scepter in his hand. He requested that the royal cape be draped around his shoulders and an open book be placed in his lap.

That was AD 814. Nearly two hundred years later, Emperor Othello determined to see if the burial request had been carried out. He allegedly sent a team of men to open the tomb and make a report. They found the body just as Charlemagne had requested. Only now, nearly two centuries later, the scene was gruesome.

The crown was tilted, the mantle moth-eaten, the body disfigured. But on the skeletal thighs was the book Charlemagne had requested- the Bible. One bony finger pointed to Matthew 16:26: "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?"