

**Grace Lutheran Church, Uniondale, New York**  
**Lutheran Church of the Epiphany~ Iglesia Luterana de la Epifanía, Hempstead, New York**  
**Marianne K. Tomecek, Interim Pastor**

*The Second Sunday in Lent B ~ February 28, 2021*

*Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16, Psalm 22:23-31, Romans 4:13-25, Mark 8:31-38*

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*C: Amen*

We are in Lent, that in-between season when we move from the glory of the incarnation of God in Jesus at Christmas, through the showing of that divine gift to the whole world during Epiphany, in preparation for the torture, suffering and death of Jesus, transformed by his resurrection at Easter and his ascension. This is a time of preparation, of discipline, study of scripture, prayer, contemplation of our sinfulness, self-reflection. And also, profound thanksgiving for the love God has for each of us to make us part of the family of believers.

Our Gospel text for the day causes us to eavesdrop on a conversation Jesus had with his disciples. But it breaks into the conversation after part – an important part – has already occurred. Jesus and the primary disciples were traveling in the villages of Caesarea Philippi, the territory under the control of Herod Philip, son of Herod the Great, and an area dedicated to the Greek god of fertility, Pan. It was not the home territory of Jesus and the disciples.

You'll remember that Jesus had asked the group who people said he was, and then who the disciples said he was. Peter answered, "You are the Messiah." Jesus ordered them not to tell anyone about him. (Mark 8:27-30.) By implication, Jesus admitted that he was, indeed, the Messiah.

Then Jesus began to teach them about what would happen: that it was necessary for him to "undergo great suffering and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again." (8:31.) Peter refused to hear this disturbing news, so he rebuked Jesus privately, who in turn rebuked Peter, saying "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." (8:32-33.) "Satan" was the Hebrew word meaning "tempter."

Too often this disclosure of Jesus is seen as a summing up of his mission on earth as solely suffering and death, instead of welcoming and reconciling sinners. Commentator Rev. Ira Driggers observes,

the overarching narrative offers a simpler, but no less profound, explanation of Jesus' death: Jesus dies because powerful humans oppose both his healing mission and, more specifically, the disruption that mission is they are opposing the in-breaking reign ("kingdom") of God.

(<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/second-sunday-in-lent-2/commentary-on-mark-831-38-5>)

Jesus goes on to tell, not just the close circle of disciples, but a crowd of followers, and told them,

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

(Mark 8:34-38.) This first mention by Jesus of the cross is a sobering pronouncement, isn't it?

The mission Jesus and his disciples are called to is to give life, but because the world is not accepting of that, and because they are faithful to God's call, that will result in their death. In fact, at the time Mark's gospel likely was written, about 70 CE, James and Peter are both thought to have been martyred already (James, 42-44 CE; Mark 10:39; Acts 12:2; Peter, about 64 CE; John 21:18-19; *Ibid.*)

What does that mean for us? Are we to give up our lives automatically to show that we truly follow Jesus? No, of course not. But we need to be ready to do so, if the need arises. Rather than putting into practice our own idea about what we'd like to do, we are to be aware of what God is calling us to do, at any minute, at any hour.

That's why we hear about Abraham and Sarah, being called by God, first, to leave their families and go wandering wherever God led them, to reach the land God promised would be theirs and that of their as-yet non-existent descendants. But God asks more of them: to become parents at the ages of 100 and 90, respectively, in order to create this multitude of descendants that

God envisions for them. Their obedience didn't take their lives away, but it must have cost their comfort and freedom to live as they wished in their old age. They did God's will, not their own.

And Paul's discussion of their obedience reminds us of his own obedience, when he suddenly changed his purpose for being from persecuting early Christians, to being the foremost apostle of Christ, traveling to places that were unknown to him, in circumstances where his life was often at risk. He, too, did God's will, not his own.

Of course, it's not always easy to follow God's call. Sometimes it's even hard to recognize it. That's why we sharpen our Christian senses, especially during Lent, with the study of scripture, more frequent prayer, extra worship opportunities like the one offered mid-week, when we do all these things in community, so that we can hear God's call in the voice of others, or in scripture, in dreams, in our own consciences.

Given what we all have gone through this past year, questions that might help us hear God's call might be, "How have I been changed by the pandemic. In what ways can I address those changes, loving and caring for myself?"

"How have the people I love, who I know, with whom I work, been changed by the pandemic? How can I respond to those changes to bring God's love and acceptance to those people?"

An example of this kind of obedience comes from our own community. As I understand it, our sister in Christ, Claire Mehrhoff, who just joined God in eternal life last week, heard God's call when she was a young mother of five, and responded. A missionary to China had addressed a group of people about his work, and Claire heard God calling her to join him on one of his trips to share the gospel and deliver Bibles to people in China. Not only Claire, but also her husband Charlie, responded to that call, because he stayed in East Meadow caring for those five children, while working and undoubtedly worrying about Claire's safety until her return. This wasn't their long-term dream; this wasn't the work of their lives that they had planned for. This was their response to God's call.

There may be many other examples of how you have responded to God's call in your own lives. I invite you to share them so that your siblings in

Christ will have the benefit of hearing them and reading their imaginations to recognize God's call to them. I'll invite any of these testimonies after our prayers this morning.

Let's pray. Open our hearts, ears and minds, Lord, to your voice calling us to do your will. Tell us, through our family members or friends, through our dreams, through scripture, by whatever means you reach us, how you wish to use us to do your will. And then move us to respond affirmatively. In your name we pray. C: Amen