

2nd Sunday of Lent
February 21, 2021

"Jesus is calling the 'whoever's' of the world to follow Him" (Mark 8:34-38)

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LSB 685

"Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Today's text for this Second Sunday in Lent is from our Gospel reading Mark 8:34-38

"When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, 'Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.'"

Here ends our text.

It was time to raise the Defcon level. Just 9 months from Jesus' impending death, He had to give greater understanding to His disciples of what was coming and what Jesus' work on the cross meant for them and all people. It's fitting that Mark tells the story of the healing of a blind man right before our text, because the disciples' vision was like that of the blind man. In stages, the blind man saw more clearly. From darkness, Jesus allowed him to see men walking like trees. And then the blurry vision vanished as Jesus touched him again, and he saw clearly.

At this point, the disciples were seeing the person and work of Jesus like a walking tree. They weren't seeing clearly. Jesus opened the eyes of His disciples to see and greater understand His mission of salvation - step by step. He does the same for you and me.

Before our text, Jesus had on two occasions fed 5000 and then 4000. Then Jesus is confronted by the Pharisees and Sadducees who ask Him for a sign. Jesus tells them the only sign you will receive is the sign of Jonah (Matthew 16:4).

Then Jesus gets in a boat with His disciples and sails to Dalmanutha. After their boat trip, Jesus tells them to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, but the disciples are still focused on physical bread. They hadn't taken any for the trip. But, of course, Jesus wasn't talking to them about loaves of bread. Mark alone includes these words from Jesus in today's Gospel chapter, **"Why do you reason because you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened? Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear?" (Mark 8:17-18)**

As we heard last week when Jesus was tempted by the devil, He responded by saying that **"It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.' "** (Matthew 4:4)

Life is much more than bread Jesus is telling us. Did He not feed the 5000 and 4000 with just a few loaves of bread and fish? Does He not provide for each of us in our time of need, whether it be a harsh freeze or sickness? Jesus tells us not to worry about our daily bread. He wanted His disciples and each of us to focus on what is the food for our souls. He wants all people to eat of the Bread of Life, Jesus Himself, and reject any false doctrine that would lead people away from Jesus.

So, finally, their vision cleared a little more and they understood what Jesus meant, as we hear in Matthew 16:12, **"they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees."**

This was the setting for the all-important question that Jesus asks His disciples in our Gospel reading: **"But who do you say that I am?" (Mark 8:29)** For the answer that must come from the heart divides all people into two groups – those who are ashamed of Jesus and those who love Him.

Jesus already knew what the Pharisees thought of Him. In Matthew 12 they said, **"This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons."** (Matthew 12:24)

Others thought Jesus was John the Baptist or Elijah reincarnated. **“But you, who do you say I am?”(Mark 8:29)** Our Gospel reading poses that same question to each of us to answer in our hearts this day.

The season of Lent is very important, because once again, God calls on us to examine our hearts, and check our vision and make sure we are seeing Jesus clearly. A lot can happen in one year’s time. People can lose their bearings very quickly, especially with all that’s gone on in the past year.

So, first of all, Jesus asks us to make sure we are seeing Him clearly. Is He anybody special, or just a somebody, a “whoever”?

Peter answers in our gospel reading, **“You are the Christ”. (Mark 8:29)** And the parallel text in Matthew 16 gives Peter’s complete answer. **“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 16:16-17)**

Peter’s answer tells us two things. Jesus is true man – the Messiah, and He is true God, the Son of the living God. No one can confess this unless the Father reveals it. Only then is clear vision given. Jesus said on an earlier occasion, **“I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes.” (Matthew 11:25)**

And then Jesus wastes no time in making clear what the Messiah was sent from heaven to do.

“And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.” (Mark 8:31)

Yes, the DEFCON alert has been raised and Jesus is very direct and to the point. He’s going to be killed. Jesus doesn’t use the veiled language that He previously used to describe His death as He did earlier in His ministry. He doesn’t say that this Temple will be destroyed and rebuilt in 3 days (John 2:19). Or, as Jonah was in the whale’s belly for 3 days and nights, so Jesus would spend 3 days and 3 nights in the heart of the earth. (Matthew 12:40).

This is the first occasion of three occasions, that Jesus uses the very clear language of what, He, the true Messiah must face and endure. It sets the tone for Lent because it shows the seriousness of the work which Jesus had to undertake. It shows how serious our problem of sin is, that God Himself had to come and fix our horrible mess.

But this is the saving message that the world needs. It is the gospel message that Jesus came to give His life for all people. How do we know this? Well, He gives a blanket invitation to “whoever” will repent and believe in Him. Not just once, but 6 times, Jesus uses the general word “whoever” or “a man” to reach out to all humanity...to reach out to us. His dying and rising again is for “whoever”!

Listen again to Jesus.

“For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it.” Jesus puts no restrictions on who can be saved. These words spoken 2000 years ago are for every generation. We are “the whoevers” whose lives also hang in the balance in 2021!

To call us a “whoever” is to say that we are loved by God. That the mercy of God extends to all people. So we read from Psalm 25:6 in our introit.

“Remember, O Lord, Your tender mercies and Your lovingkindnesses, For they are from of old.”

In our Old Testament reading from Genesis 17, God promises Abraham that he would be a father of many nations and Sarah a mother of many nations. How? Jesus says, **“for My sake and the Gospel’s sake”**. The Gospel is the good news for all nations in Jesus Christ, THE Descendent of Abraham.

“Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ.” (Galatians 3:16)

We were “nobodys”, “whoevers”, unrighteous, enemies of God. And yet, God calls us to repentance to receive justification by Jesus’ blood. Listen to our Epistle from Romans 5.

“For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward

us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. 10 For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.” (Romans 5:7-10)

Again, especially during this time of Lent, Jesus calls us to deny self and follow Him. Whoever tries to save his or her life will lose it and be a “whoever” in hell for eternity. But, whoever loses his or her life, repents of all that is sinful and falls on the mercy of God will be a “blessed whoever” who spends eternity in heaven. For when the Holy Spirit makes you His child through faith in Jesus, you become His sheep. And you are not a no name, but Jesus knows you by name and calls you by name. (John 10:3)

To be a “Whoever”, a believing blessed “whoever” is a gift from God. Abraham and Sarah received this gift. Peter did and Jesus praised him that the Good News had been revealed to him by His Father.

To believe in Jesus is to see Him clearly, not as a blurry walking tree, but as the Messiah who died on the tree for all men. And Jesus makes this blanket promise to all people:

32 “Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. 33 But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 10:32-33)

Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)