

Pastor Morgan Gordy
16th Sunday after Pentecost

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark.
Glory to you, O Lord.

²⁷Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” ²⁸And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” ²⁹He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” ³⁰And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

³¹Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

³⁴He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵For 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. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸Those 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.”

The Gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, O Christ.

Grace and Peace from our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ.

Coming up next Saturday is the Southeastern Synod Women of the ELCA Convention Last year it was cancelled due to COVID.... this year – yearning to be back together again.. they had to move to a virtual event. We all yearn to gather freely again.

I remember so many good times at WELCA conventions of the past... But one came to mind as I was preparing this sermon... It was in 2018 and the theme for that year was “women of action...answering the call”.

It was super hero time!... where ordinary women used their extraordinary gifts to be present to one another, share their stories, and their love of serving in Jesus name..

Jesus the one we confess as Lord and Savior...the Messiah...

We were challenged by the Rev Dr. Kathryn Bradley Love to follow Jesus even into those places we don't want to go...

She said “It’s easy to follow Jesus if its sitting in the pew and hearing the stories.. harder to go out to tell someone else...especially if they are in places we don’t want to go...

It’s easy to feed the hungry...look at our potlucks...but what about the hungry poor...the homeless...the masses of this world with nothing...”

Well?

Its good and easy to follow Jesus when its within our comfort zone or our sphere of expectations...when it’s not going to cost us much...

But what about when it’s not? When the costs are considerable?

Peter had just confessed that Jesus is the Messiah.....

Jesus had been given the disciples some pretty hard teachings...challenging their understanding of who is held within the realm of God’s love and concern... and now this teaching proves the hardest for them to swallow.

Sundays and Seasons reminds us that “Three weeks ago we heard John’s gospel’s version of Peter’s confession of faith. This week we hear Mark’s version, when Peter says, “You are the Messiah.” In John, the stumbling block is Jesus’ invitation to eat his flesh, given for the life of the world. In Mark too the scandal has to do with Jesus’ words. But this time it is about his own impending death and resurrection...”

This story is the turning point in Mark’s gospel. Peter is the first one of the disciples to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah, but he cannot accept what Jesus says.....that as the Messiah, that Jesus will have to suffer.

Put yourself there...

Jesus’ was gaining an even greater following and he spoke with authority calling out for new way of life.. One of acceptance and love... challenging ways of the time and traditionand that flew in the face of power...

as in our reading from Isaiah, one could see that Jesus had set his face like flint.

Jesus was continuing his mission...his ministry...traveling...teaching..healing...

this time he was enroute to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, **“Who do people say that I am?”**

He had created quite a following and had brought great attention to himself from the religious leaders and Herod as well.

The disciples answered Jesus saying “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.”

After all, Jesus had done everything well.... it was said in last Sunday’s Gospel. Others noted that He spoke with authority. He had performed miracles..

And Prophets were known to be raised up among the people with a participatory insight into the experience of the community and an openness to the heart of God making them intermediaries of message –mouthpieces for God...

Prophets are expected to speak God’s words.. so one could understand why they thought Jesus was possibly a prophet... prophets often say things that challenge the status quo when God’s kingdom is not being lived out or God’s children suffer... But why, John the Baptist?

Remember John had been just beheaded by Herod. John was fearless in speaking God’s judgement against Herod and Herodius.... Resulting in his execution at their hand.

Also, John was considered a prophet and had quite a following himself...

And he spoke truth to power...

Power doesn't like that...

So as Jesus following grew...people wondered, Herod wondered, has John come back from the dead?

But now Jesus goes deeper. He turns to his disciples ... and asked them, **“But who do you say that I am?”**

Peter, who has never been a loss for words.... answered him, “You are the Messiah!”

Have you ever thought about how startling it is for Peter to say this?

From the expectations of that time - Jesus wasn't fitting the expected bill of the Messiah...he wasn't a military leader, he didn't come with the vestiges of temporal power. How on earth could he retake Jerusalem and undo the Roman occupation? So what Peter is saying is startling!! I wonder if it even startled him! Perhaps a deeper knowing...perhaps the movement of the Spirit...

After Peter's profession ... *Jesus began to teach them what being Christ means:*

³¹....that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected and be killed, and after three days rise again.

This is NOT what was expected....

This didn't fit their expectation of what the Messiah would do..would experience....that he would suffer and die?? And by the hands of those he was to conquer!

And Peter the natural leader and friend...took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But Jesus didn't let his words stand...he turned and looked at his disciples, and he rebuked Peter.

According to Clint Black whose commentary on this text said, Jesus essentially said "SHUT UP, PETER" and called him Satan! But not without a teaching...

"Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

Poor Peter....

Jesus's words were hard words for a friend to hear...I am sure..

who would want their friend to die! this wasn't supposed to happen to one of them...someone they loved...they followed...someone they staked their lives and livelihoods on... And then this rebuke.. you can imagine the confusion...

This is a turning point in Mark's Gospel..

Mark begins his gospel with the Gospel of Jesus the Christ – we don't hear about what Christ means until now.,... now we know that it entails suffering, and death on a cross and a resurrection.

And it has implications for his followers too... implications for us...

It is life changing... it is a life of following...

Jesus tells the disciples and the crowd too, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

This is an all in venture.

This is the Way.

This is a hard teaching.

It involves risk. Even one's life.

The three young men, James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner, who were tortured and murdered during the Summer of Freedom in 1964 by the Klan for registering people to vote in MS, they knew that...

In today's civil rights movement - The Reverend Dr. William Barber who co-leads the Poor People's campaign...knows that... [and I am paraphrasing] says this risk is real.. and it is present anytime you advocate for the vulnerable and the poor against places of power that benefits by things staying the same...

Following Jesus involves risk – may even mean risking your life, your livelihood, your status or station...perhaps even your friends or your family...

As I work in Disaster Response I come across people who have lived this...

In the recent floods in central TN where 22 people lost their lives...among those lost were some who were attempting to rescue others from the flood waters.....

In Waverly, an older woman went door to door in their apartment complex trying to rouse people and get them to flee as the flood waters were rising... all got out in time – except her...

She risked it all for the sake of others..

Not all our crosses will look the same... we will find them in the situations in our lives where we are called to risk something of ourselves in order to care for the neighbor ... to care for God's good Creation...

It's in those situations where we have to decide whether or not we are going to follow Jesus and take the risk and accept what follows ...in big and in little ways...

As followers of Jesus – our lives are to reflect his ... his way..... and that has consequences...just as it did for Jesus....

It did for Peter and of the apostles who would be ostracized within their own communities and most would suffer a martyr's death for following and teaching that Jesus is Lord through their lives and witness.

Jesus is calling for more than obedience – Jesus is calling for active participation in his life... its walking and living the way...

Let us pray for God to give us the grace needed to pick up our crosses and follow Jesus..

One thing for sure...as the Spirit was active in Peter that day, the Spirit is active in our lives as well... moving us and drawing us into the fullness of the Christ – even when we fail and get swayed by this world's ways...

The One into whose death we were baptized, who calls us, forgives us claims us as his own ... to the cross and beyond...

Amen.