

2nd Sunday Lent B 18

February 25, 2018

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

For such a short gospel, Mark has some of the most dramatic, fast paced and powerful stories. Mark's gospel is really broken into two halves, the first starts at Jesus' baptism with his ministry in Galilee in the northern part of the Israel. There we see Jesus healing, performing miracles and teaching all of which leads up to our reading for today. Following our reading from today is the transition moment as Jesus takes Peter and James and John up the mountain as is transfigured before them. When they come down the mountain, Jesus continues his teaching and his instruction about what would soon happen as he turns toward to Jerusalem and his death on the cross.

Up to this point, Jesus has been teaching and trying to show the disciples who he is as the Son of Man and the Son of God. The additional verses I read today are the beginning of this section as Jesus turns his attention toward fulfilling his mission, of going down that difficult road of preparing the disciples for what is about to take place. Throughout the gospels, the disciples never seem to quite get it, but here Jesus asks them directly, "who do the people say I am?" Their responses were what might have been expected. "Some say you are John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." After which Jesus asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." And Jesus sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

This is another hallmark of Mark's gospel as Jesus does many signs and wonders, but continually request or commands that nothing is said. Most of the time the person who had been healed or cured do not obey him, but they leave with loud voices, praising God and pointing to Jesus as this great prophet and messenger from God. The only ones who seemed to keep quiet

2nd Sunday Lent B 18

February 25, 2018

were the disciples, it appears they had seen the light, and began to understand that Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah, the one they have been hoping and praying would come.

For the disciples and many others, the messiah was going to be a powerful and forceful leader, one who would throw off the yoke of the Romans, break free from the oppression they had been under for generations and reestablish the throne of David in Jerusalem. There would once again be an earthly kingdom with all the power and majesty of the great kingdoms of the past. So as soon as the disciples heard the words confirming their hopes and dreams, their understanding of the messiah, of what would take place, the glory and the rescue from oppression came to be foremost in their minds. But this was all shattered in a moment as Jesus began to explain to them what must and will take place as Jesus tells them for the first time.

Mark records: *'Jesus 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. He said all this quite openly.'* Jesus wanted to be clear, about all that was to take place and there was no getting around it. The journey he was on was set. Now as the disciples pondered and wondered what it would mean to have a Messiah different than the one they expected, we hear the voice of Peter rebuking and telling Jesus not to let it happen, only to have Jesus put Peter in his place, to tell him to get in line behind him and to follow him.

Jesus continues to teach as he speaks clearly about what it means to be a follower, one who travels behind the leader, not preceding the leader but watching and learning and staying in the path of the one who goes ahead of them. Jesus tells them, if you are to be my follower then you are to deny yourself, pick up your cross and follow me. The key words are, "follow me".

February 25, 2018

In the social media of our world, following someone, having followers has kind of brought on a new understanding of what it means to follow someone. Now I know some of you are not on computers, or use social media or use Facebook or Twitter or Snap Chat, but followers there have become for many a status symbol and currency. If a person on Youtube or Twitter can show a large number of followers, they can make money from advertising just because they have a large number who might see their advertising. In that world having followers often is less about the facts or the importance of what you say in your tweet or your video as the fact that you have followers. Once you have a certain number of followers, or are trending in some way, more followers come looking to see that everyone else is looking at. It has become so important for some that they pay an organization to sign up followers for them.

So I wonder if some they think being a Christian is about being a fan or an admirer, a follower of Jesus in the same way. But watching from a distance is not good enough; proclaiming our love for him then going our separate ways, doing our own thing does not work. Trying to read the tea leaves or determining with knowledge where Jesus might be going so we can take a short cut to get there ahead of him does not work either, because to follow someone is to walk in their footsteps, to travel down the same path as they did and to journey with them on the road where they are going. But that is not an easy task for any of us to do.

In my preparation I reread an article about a project where a man, David Plotz, blogged a few years ago about the Bible on Slate.com. This led him to reading the whole Bible, every word. In his case it was only the Old Testament being a non-practicing Jew, yet for him it was an eye-opening experience. He found stories and situations he experienced in daily life. He

February 25, 2018

encountered the basis for the many rituals and practices he was told to he should do but was never told the why or their connection to his religious past. He wrote, *“The Bible is the first source of everything from the smallest plot twists, to the most fundamental ideas of morality to our grandest notions of law and justice.”* David spent a year writing and blogging about his journey of reading every word in the Bible, from the most awe inspiring stories of creation, to the heroic tales of Debra or Esther, to the boring census of counting of all the people as they wandered the desert.

At the end of his article, David confesses he is still the agnostic he was before he started down this path. *“The Bible has brought me no closer to God, if that means either believing in a deity acting in the world or experiencing the transcendent. But perhaps I’m closer to God in the sense that the Bible has put me on high alert. I came to the Bible hoping to be inspired and awed. I have been sometimes. But mostly I’ve ended up in a yearlong argument with God.”*

Our journey with Jesus is not much different as we wrestle with and argue with Christ about what it means to be a disciple unable to let go of ourselves and follow him. After all these are not stories of long ago events, but narratives of people on a journey of faith. For us as Christians, the accounts of the journeys of Jesus and his disciples in the New Testament offer us a road map and a guide as we search what it means for us to be a follower of Jesus. The Bible in some ways becomes a guide book with examples of how others made the journey before us, where they model for us what it means to deny ourselves and to bear our cross as we journey down our own road of faith.

Paul uses the example of Abraham as he writes to the Romans. *“For this all depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be*

2nd Sunday Lent B 18

February 25, 2018

guaranteed to all. No distrust made Abraham waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.” Our God, Jesus, the Messiah who was raised from the dead is the one whom we believe in, is the one in whom we put our trust, is the one to whom we follow.

AMEN

T.G.B.T.G.

Mark 8:22-38 (NRSV)

²⁷ Jesus 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?" ²⁸ And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." ²⁹ He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." ³⁰ And Jesus sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

³¹ Then 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. ³² He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But turning and looking at his disciples, Jesus rebuked Peter saying, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

³⁴ He 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. ³⁵ 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. ³⁶ For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷ Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸ 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."