

A Sermon for DaySpring

By Burt L. Burleson

“His Way, Our Way”

Mark 8: 31-35

March 12, 2006

Today’s Gospel story is set up by a question, “Who do you say that I am?”
And, Peter hit it right out of the park.

He hit the bull’s eye...

... the nail on the head.

“You are the Christ.”

When the question rolled casually off Jesus’ lips, “what do you guys think?”, some of the disciples had just looked quickly at the ground not wanting to catch his eye for fear they’d be called on to give the answer. “Andrew, what do you think?”

Some of them even closed their eyes

and put their hand to their forehead

so they’d look like they were praying about the matter.

Some made that multifunctional, proverbial groaning sound that makes it sound like you’re pondering something deep and are on the right page when really you haven’t got a clue...

“Hummmmm... who?” (Our grad students hear this sound a lot... if someone says something you don’t get, just groan... Hummmmm.)

Matthew tried to stall for time by getting legalistic. **“Now Jesus, when you ask ‘who do you say that I am...’ do you mean you as in us or you as in me... plural or singular... Or when you use the word say do you mean, have we actually said it out loud or would it suffice if we’d just had the thought?”** He’d pulled out a piece of papyrus to jot down Jesus’ clarifying remarks.

Philip was squinting and snapping his fingers up beside his head like he was trying to magically pull out the answer “presto” from some deeper place. **“Who-who do you say? We’ve covered this, haven’t we?”**

Just prior to blurting out his answer, Peter’s expression had gone from a flat “I haven’t the foggiest” to an “I can’t believe I’ve never seen this before.” Confidence was written across his face and resounded in his tone of voice. **“You’re the Christ... that’s who I say you are.”**

Jesus said, **“Very good Simon... you’re blessed, God showed you this and I’m not only going to call you Rock from now on, I’m going to build my church on you.”**

That’s the scene, the mood, the dialogue as Mark invites us all as readers to turn the corner Jesus was about to turn. **“Then...”** It’s one of those transitional words.

“Then...” it’s an adverb about time... about timing... **“Then, he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected and that he must be killed...”**

Then...

While they were thinking in their minds about Jesus being a deliverer...

While visions of rapture from the Romans danced in their heads...

Then... while they were rehearsing their responses to all the accolades that surely would flow to a disciple of the Anointed One. **“I’d like to thank all the little people who made this possible.”**

Then... with all of their Messianic assumptions tucked neatly into bed and all of their doctrines of salvation ironed out.

Then, Jesus begins to teach them what it meant to be Messiah.

Then Peter, who was still strutting from having hit the theological nail on the head, crossed a line. You know how it is...

when confidence

slides easily into arrogance

and arrogance on into stupidity. (That's a slippery slope, btw)

Peter's thinking, **"I got that last answer right and I'm going to nip this 'death-talk' in the bud."**

Full of himself, he pulls Jesus aside... and the word Mark uses is "rebuke." It's a harsh word. It's the tone Jesus takes with the demons in other gospel passages. It's what we parents do when we've just had it and it's time for a good talkin' to. I occasionally got rebuked.

Peter doesn't pull Jesus aside and use a nondirective, Rogerian method. **"Jesus, what I hear you saying is that you've gotten the impression that folks aren't going to accept you... how do you feel about that?"**

He doesn't pull him aside and say... **"Hey guy, let's think this through... I know you've had a few rough moments with those grumpy old Pharisees... but we've got to get past that and be positive."**

Nope... Peter, in all his Barney Fife Fullness... rebukes Jesus.

"Jesus, are you out of your mind... You scaring the bejebbers out of the fellas and besides, Messiahs don't suffer... Everyone knows they take away suffering. Now, knock it off and I mean now."

That was over the line and Jesus rebuked him right back. **"Shut up, Satan! You're thinking like a man would think and that's not the way God thinks at all."**

So... he goes from confessing a faith good enough to build the Church on... to being the incarnation of Satan just like that. There's a big difference in confession and understanding.

And we do, rightly so, always begin in confession... the Church always has, right from the beginning, **"Christ is Lord,"** which was short-hand for **"Jesus was God in the flesh."** That was the confession and it took, oh, about three or four centuries before the church understood and said, **"Here... this is our best guess as to what that means... We like to call it... The Trinity."**

Confession is always the easy part and Jesus said that clearly. **"Way to go, Peter... Bless you... But you didn't figure this out on your own, God revealed it to you."**

There is something revealed and we say, **"Wow, would you look at that... You're the Christ, that's who you are."**

What that means... is another thing altogether. And "then" Jesus starts to tell them what it means... plainly... time for Jesus to interpret Jesus.

**"I'm going to suffer...
Be rejected...
Die."**

It's Jesus telling them what it means to be the Christ they have confessed.

It's real clear Peter and company were a long way from getting it. So much so that the understanding of it Simon, the Rock, expresses- is called evil.

The Church confessing, without the Church understanding, can be a dangerous thing and at times in our history, it's even been evil. Blind, immature, cock-sure confession... can hurt people.

To say, **"We believe this or that about Jesus... he is Messiah... Savior of the World... my best friend... sacrificial lamb... Lord of life..."** whatever your confession is... is... in a way, easy. Coming to make sense of that isn't. We don't get all there is to get, up front.

And like Peter, in our shallowness, rather than humbly saying to Jesus, **"would you teach us what that means,"** we impose our own understanding on it. **"We know!" "I know!"** We say with "Rock-Like" assurance.

Should you be so sure?

... So sure you know how it is that Jesus is going to save you?

The name Jesus means... **"The one who saves."** How is it that you are being saved?

And I know, we're on this side of the resurrection and we've been taught all sorts of doctrines and we can sing all sorts of hymns about it.... but can you be so sure that our culture and our

expectations and our shallowness aren't at the blackboard of your awareness defining what that means... and defining all it means... confining what it means... limiting what it means?

Peter had a certain picture of the Messiah shaped by his culture and by his own perceived needs and by his level of spiritual maturity. And it was Moses and Elijah and David and Solomon and Rambo all rolled into one.

Are you so sure that this culture of self-fulfillment hasn't created in your mind expectations of a "self-help Messiah?" A Jesus that makes you feel better. Makes you ok and me ok. Helps you win friends and influence people.

Or has your patriotism, perhaps, dressed up Jesus to look like Uncle Sam? Is your Bible wrapped up in your flag?

Or has the drive to success and excellence and all that... created in you the desire for a savior who is your "head hunter," your ticket up the ladder? Rather than sacrifice, God helps you succeed.

Or has a culture of violence and scapegoating created a Messiah who just comes to bleed a lot? A Mel Gibson Jesus? The more blood, the more suffering the better and now God is sort of required to love you and let you in. That's what some of you picture. He suffers, so I don't have to... Really????? That's not what today's gospel says.

What we need to be saved from, and what we need to be saved to, and how that happens... is not for us to decide. We can't see... we don't know ourselves that well.

There's a reason the church called this "The Paschal Mystery"...the suffering mystery. There's a reason that the salvation of God is expressed in an event. God... suffering... dying. We see it... it draws us... moves us and speaks to us at levels we cannot yet express.

The movement on the other side of our confession is to follow. That's what Jesus said... **"Deny yourselves, pick up your cross and follow me."**

Christianity is an event that set us on a path (a good line from Doyle Young). What is expressed in the event of the cross is to be embodied in the experience of our lives.

The Reality of God... The Loving Truth of what God is in God's essence...Love...which goes out...

gets expressed in time...

in a life... on a cross...

as the ultimate icon (picture), though which, into which, we are drawn.

Jesus shows us the way, **"The Son of Man will suffer and die,"** and then He invites us to follow, **"deny your self and pick up your cross."**

And it's all backwards from what we think will save us. Isn't it? If we want to save our lives we must somehow lose them first. Or we save our souls (another translation for that word) by surrendering them.

And there's so much there (about self and soul)... don't even get me started.

Know this, for now, Jesus is telling us that what we think is our life and what we think is our essence, isn't. It's an illusion! An illusion that we have to let go of... if we're ever going to get to what is real.

And you're saying... asking, **"Fine... I'm there! I'm all for it. But what does that mean for me?"**

And the real point is that I don't know and neither will you. Isn't that the worst thing? ... That all you know is that you're relinquishing all you know... what you've come to think is so essential.

You're surrendering who you think you are... and I know you want to do that with some picture or some assurance as to what that means and what awaits you once that happens... but there is none.

Yes, that's what I said... there is none.

On the cross Jesus isn't thinking, **"I sure can't wait to get to Sunday."** That's not one of His 7 last words. He's thinking, **"God, where in the world are you... you've abandoned me... Are you even there? Is any of this real? Will it matter? Does it mean anything?"**

Jesus has faith that it will (mean something). He has faith on the cross... not certainty of Sunday. He trusts... he risks... he lets go... he suffers and surrenders and dies... and shows us the way to life. **"Here's the way God is going to save you."**

The cross is an event that reveals a path... and it is a path of surrender and complete trust and there is no other way.

Have you seen the Matrix? Lot's of great spiritual, gospel themes in that movie... you ought to see it. There's Neo... this Christ figure... who is being invited to let go of the Matrix... this computer program he's in... which is the illusion of life... but there's no life.

And there's a scene where he's sitting with Morpheus, a John the Baptist-like character, and it's time to decide. There are 2 pills on the table... a red pill and a blue pill... and Neo is invited to take the red pill as a sign of his willingness to let go and to wake up. He asks for some assurance... **"What's going to happen?"**

"You'll go further down the rabbit hole." (An illusion to "Through the Looking Glass".)

Morpheus gives him no assurances... no "how to"... nothing to hang onto but the promise of the truth. The promise of what is real.

Neo swallows the red pill and is then unhooked from what has him enslaved and falls helplessly into water where he has to be rescued... sound familiar. He cannot save himself... he is saved... and not at all on his own terms.

"Is there another way, God... can this cup pass from me?" Even Jesus says it... **"Can salvation be something other than a radical trusting of God?"**

"No... there is no other path."

Evagrius... this 4th Century Teacher gave his students this word. **If you imitate Christ, you will become blessed. Your soul will die his death... Your exodus, (salvation) will be like the exodus of a star, and your resurrection will glow like the sun.** (#21) It's on the front of your worship guide. Say it with me.

There's only one way to resurrection. Only one path to life... revealed to us in Jesus. This reality that becomes an event... that becomes your experience. The story of God... that becomes your story.

His way... that becomes our way.