

This kingdom story worth retelling is a hinge passage of Mark’s Gospel.

9 am- reference Isaiah 9:6 and Good Christian Friends Rejoice...

10:30 am- Did any of you find it odd, or maybe you found it refreshing and a pleasant surprise, for our worship today to begin with Christmas texts, liturgy, and hymns? Yes, I know it is September, but there is a reason these elements of worship fit the way they do today. And besides, as Christians, every day is a day to celebrate the birth and life of our Lord and Savior, right?

On one side, these verses today serve as a hinge connecting us with the gift and meaning of Jesus being born as God incarnate (Christmas). We will discuss this further, but Peter’s declaration that “Jesus is the Messiah” is what recalls our memory to why God sent Jesus to be human to begin with. On the other side, these verses today serve as a hinge connecting us with the necessity of Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection (Easter). In an effort to clarify what it truly means to be the Messiah, Jesus teaches the disciples that he must undergo great suffering, be rejected, be killed, and rise again.

This kingdom story worth retelling is important, vital, and plays a monumental role in our faithful search for the truths of God’s kingdom. I might even call this passage in Mark a turning point, a stairway to heaven, a bridge to the other side, a doorway to freedom, a key to eternal life, a gate to the promised land.

So, what you are saying Peter is that this passage is one to pay attention to; what you are saying Peter is that this passage is a life-changing, climactic, plot twist? Yes, that is what I am saying. Martha Moore-Keish calls this whole passage “scandalous”, and I love that word used here. Why? Not because of the scandal we think of on tv where things are promiscuous, but because this passage offers startling and inexplicable claims about 1) who Jesus is, 2) why Jesus did what he did while on earth, and 3) our call to discipleship as committed Christians.

1)Who is Jesus and why is he scandalous? It is a startling and inexplicable claim that Jesus of Nazareth is both a real human being and God incarnate. This insists that God has been encountered in a Palestinian Jew in the first century. This challenges classical assumptions about God as “a Spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.” When we affirm that Jesus Christ is this God in human flesh, it challenges any straightforward philosophical assertions about the nature of

divinity. It opens the possibility of God being more than the sovereign God living in the great beyond. It brings God closer and invites God into the intimate spaces of our life.

To their best knowledge, many people believed Jesus to be like that of John the Baptist, Elijah, or any one of the other prophets. In these names they would say Jesus was surely blessed by God, but to be God incarnate was another level I would say they wouldn't quite grasp. Many of the people would have been familiar with the Old Testament prophecies that God would one day send a savior, like the promise of Isaiah 9, but most of those prayers included hope and belief that God would send a warrior strong enough to take down the Romans in battle. They weren't witnessing that hope and belief in Jesus so perhaps he was just another prophet. Then we encounter Peter, who says boldly to Jesus, **"You are the Messiah."**

Two Questions: From where did Peter get that? And was Peter, right?

To consider this, I would like to invite us to consider the development of relationships. "When strangers meet, there is a fairly standard ritual followed as they seek to get acquainted. It begins with the names, of course. Then follow the questions: Where do you live? Are you married and do you have a family? Where did you grow up? What is your job? Where did you, or do you, go to school? What are your hobbies? A stranger turns into an acquaintance, and we get a sense of who the other person is when we gain a context. If the relationship develops, there are other insights to be gained; the values that shape behavior and decisions; the vision of success that provides the sense of direction; the awareness of whether the other is trustworthy, whether the other has integrity, whether the other treats people with dignity and compassion. Thus, an acquaintance turns into a friend. And with further experience, a friend may turn into a life companion. There are limits to how much we can know about another person. In everyone there are secrets of the heart that will not be revealed or that cannot be discerned. Even two people who have lived together in a wonderfully shared marriage for half a century and more will find there are surprises in the other, and ever new insights to be gained. It is the wonder of life in human community that people are endlessly fascinating as they express in attitude and word and deed who they are.

In this passage, Mark pictures a scene that takes place some considerable time after Jesus and his disciples have begun their relationship with each other. They once were strangers that became acquaintances, then friends, and then life companions. Jesus says, "Who do you say that I am?" This is when Peter answers. From what Peter has come to know of Jesus, from what Peter has seen Jesus do, from what Peter has heard Jesus say, Peter calls Jesus "Messiah."

Seems the answer is spot on from what we know of the definition of “Messiah” meaning Christ. Did Peter answer Jesus’ question the right way? Is “Messiah” a suitable title? Jesus’ response to not tell others about him with that title suggests there is more. **What Jesus says next suggests that Peter may very well have the right title but the wrong understanding of what “Messiah” means for Jesus.**

We have insight to this because when Jesus says that he is going to suffer and be rejected and be killed, Peter doesn’t want to hear any of that. Peter may not have even heard Jesus declare that he was going to rise again in three days because he was so ready to respond in disbelief. **Peter didn’t want to hear about a suffering Messiah. Peter, like many others in that time, was looking for a Messiah who would establish God’s rule with power and authority, and who will bring his followers glory and reward.**

In response, Jesus tells Peter that he is setting his mind not on divine things but on human things (vs. 33). According to human conceptions of the word “Messiah”, in which Peter’s declaration fits, suffering should be conquered rather than embraced, but according to divine things, suffering and death, as Jesus teaches and embodies, are necessary to being God’s anointed. Jesus changes what Peter meant by “Messiah” as no longer a title of triumphant power, but a name associated with suffering, rejection, and public execution.

Application: I want to stop here and ask, “Who do you say that Jesus is?” On the basis of your relationship with Jesus, on the basis of what you have come to know of Jesus in the biblical witness and in the life of the Christian community, you too, we all, are charged to make an assessment of who Jesus is. There are many titles or descriptions we could use: Messiah, Christ, Lord, Savior, Master, Friend, Teacher, Prophet, Son of God, Redeemer, Ultimate Example, Servant Leader. Whatever word we chose, what does that mean? What does it mean for us if we call Jesus Savior? What does it mean for us if we call Jesus Son of God? What does it mean for us if we too call Jesus Messiah?

Harry Adams writes, “Jesus’ challenge to Peter is a challenge to us as well. We can and must gain the right perspective, one in which our mind is set on divine things and not human things. In who Jesus is, God enables us to find a way that is different from the way of the world, enables us to discern how life is fulfilled as God intends, enables us to live by values that are not embodied in the normal course of human affairs.”

Who do you say that Jesus is?

2)After we come to claim Jesus as the Messiah promised to the Jews, we are forced to accept the scandalous, radical, and strange meaning of Jesus as the Messiah.

In reference to being the Messiah, Jesus declares that he “must undergo great suffering.” Wait? What does that even mean? In what sense are Jesus’ suffering and death necessary? I think there are two possible interpretations of this we are to consider.

One is outlined by **Anselm**, who interpreted the cross as a necessity in order to resolve the tension between God’s judgment and God’s mercy. Because God is both just and merciful, the fall of humanity poses a conundrum: divine justice requires that the debt be repaid, but divine mercy drives God to reach out to sinful humanity. Jesus Christ, God incarnate, show God’s mercy in paying the debt, and his payment simultaneously fulfills divine justice. **Because God’s justice and God’s mercy both had to be satisfied, Christ’s suffering and death are necessary.**

Another way to interpret Jesus’ insistence that he “must undergo great suffering” is that he needs to endure the depth of human pain in order to reconcile humanity with God. For Jesus Christ to bring full humanity into communion with God, he must bear the fullness of human experience, including suffering and death. **Based on this interpretation, Jesus’ suffering and death are the outworking of God’s decision to enter into and reclaim the whole of human existence.**

Application: Why is it that God chose suffering and sacrifice as key truths to God’s kingdom and not swords and success? That is a scandalous act of God right there. The answer. God said, “My thoughts are higher than your thoughts and my ways are higher than your ways.” Humanities’ way of swords and success were (are) doing nothing but destroy. Swords and success weren’t working to bring people closer to God. So, God came, in the form a baby and servant leader, to love and save. God came in the flesh to show us that God is with us in life and not just a powerful being hidden in the clouds and bright lights. In this suffering with, this compassion to be with us, God intends to pull more of us in, because we want to be close to God and have a relationship with a God that gets where we are and is willing to walk with us. It is in this close relationship that we learn the heart of who Jesus is and grow in our understanding of just how strong and powerful God is. This truth about God we gain in faith has been highlighted in a variety of ways as the world seems to be in a perpetual state of struggle and suffering- from natural disasters like fires, hurricanes, tornadoes, and earthquakes, to human disasters like war, division, oppression, hunger, and the list goes on. Because Christ came to live as one like us, and suffered in life as we can, God knows and God cares.

3)The third scandalous element of this passage is Jesus’ call, “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 (vv. 34-35)."

In what sense are Christians, are we, called to "lose our lives"? What is the life that needs to be lost in order to be saved?

Sharon Hinge suggests, "To deny oneself is to remove oneself from consideration, just as Peter would later do to Jesus in Mark 14." "Picking up one's cross" is not accepting just any burden, but rather being prepared to put one's life on the line for the sake of Jesus and the gospel. The disciples are indeed called to be prepared to share in the fate of the one they follow, and to recognize that it is there that true life is found."

The charge to pick up one's cross is a forego of worldly desires and temptations that take us away from who God is and what God is all about. To be clear, it is not just a wall of protection to keep things out. It is an active offering to "let go and let God." Have you heard that phrase before, "let go and let God"? It is a great one to keep in your arsenal. To "let go and let God" is an offering to God; an acknowledgement that you can't do everything on your own; an active pledge of faith that God, through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, can and will act and keep your best interests in play. To "let go and let God" can be a way of life lived in reciprocity to the way God lives. Why are we to love? Because God has first loved us. How do we love? The way God loves us. This also includes why we are to show mercy and compassion to others. Because God shows us mercy and compassion. Why are we to forgive? Because God has forgiven us. To deny oneself is to put God first. To pick up one's cross is choosing God's way over our own. This call from Jesus is no small task. This call from Jesus is not just a one-time thing, it is a daily thing. To follow Christ's call, we must be intentional about what we do and why we do it. How do we know this is what we are to do? Because God sent Jesus to be born, to live, to die, to be raised, and to ascend; so we could be filled with the reverent awe, amazing grace, unbinding hope, and unimaginable courage to follow him in faith.

This kingdom story worth retelling (this scandalous passage) addresses for us the question of what it means to confess that Jesus is the Messiah. It suggests that "Messiah" is not a straightforward human title, but a mysterious name that means suffering and death, bearing the cross and losing life- so that life may in the end be saved. (Martha Moore-Keish- FOTW)

This kingdom story worth retelling (this scandalous passage) moves us far beyond information to commitment. It demands from us, if we are faithful readers, a decision that we will follow Jesus to the place that he is going!!!

Invitation to the Table:

*Jesus Messiah, name above all names
Blessed Redeemer, Emmanuel
The rescue for sinners
The ransom from Heaven
Jesus Messiah, Lord of all*

*His body, the bread
His blood, the wine
Broken and poured out all for love
The whole earth tremble and the veil was torn*

Love so amazing

*All our hope is in You
All our hope is in You
All the glory to You, God
The light of the world*

*Jesus Messiah, name above all names
Blessed Redeemer, Emmanuel
The rescue for sinners
The ransom from Heaven
Jesus Messiah, Lord of all*

(Source: [Musixmatch](#), Songwriters: Chris Tomlin / Daniel Carson / Jesse Pryor Reeves / Cash Ed)