



Second Sunday in Lent

February 25, 2018 – 9:00 a.m.

Rev. Todd Goldschmidt, Pastor

Theme: Who Will It Be—Jesus, or Me?

Sermon Text: Mark 8:31-38

³¹ He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.³² He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

³³ But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. “Get behind me, Satan!” he said. “You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

³⁴ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save their life^[b] will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.³⁶ What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? ³⁷ Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ³⁸ If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.”

The Season of Lent comes around every year like clock-work, and it lasts a while. It has to last a while if for no other reason than this: that it’s so hard for us to get the points made so

strikingly in Lent. This Sunday, we see God's seriousness in this: Salvation and suffering go hand in hand—for Jesus, and for us!

There was a great deal of confusion in 1st century Israel as to who, exactly, Jesus was. Some said He was John the Baptist; others claimed He was the Elijah or another Jewish prophet. Just before our text, Jesus asked His disciples, **“Who do you say I am?”** Peter shot back, **“You are the Messiah”** (Mark 8:27-30). Matthew reports in his Gospel that Peter added, **“The Son of the living God”** (16:16). What a relief! Those intensive years of seminary training had paid off for Peter. The disciples knew *who* Jesus was, but they didn't fully comprehend *what that meant*—for Him, or for them. They still had much to learn *about* Jesus *from* Jesus.

Jesus had been facing increasing opposition from His enemies. More and more He drew the Twelve aside to instruct them privately. During those tutorials, **“He ... began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this.”** Up to this point in His ministry, Jesus had spoken about His death and resurrection in a more “veiled” manner. But now He began to explicitly describe what His redeeming work for the world would entail. To emphasize His humanity, He uses the term He preferred for Himself: **“the Son of Man.”**

Jesus, the eternal Son of God, became **“the Son of Man”** in order to rescue us from the everlasting punishment we deserved due to our indelible sinful nature—a “thanks for nothing” inheritance passed down to every human being since Cain was conceived and born in the image of his fallen parents, Adam and Eve. And there's not a thing we, or anyone else, could do about it. But God could. And God did. In love, He dispatched His beloved Son from heaven to become one of us; One with us. Jesus lived up to God's standard of perfection in our place. Every breath He drew, every word He spoke, every deed He did met God's expectations 100%. Jesus never sinned. Not once. Not ever. But God deemed Him the guiltiest sinner who ever trod this earthly sod. Isaiah foretold of Him: **“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we have been healed”** (53:5).

Jesus **“spoke plainly about this”** to His disciples that day. His words could not have been clearer. But Peter wasn't having it. In fact, he **“took [Jesus] aside and began to rebuke him.”** The audacity! But Peter wasn't being subversive—at least not by his reckoning. His chastisement of Jesus was born out of fear. Peter longed for the crown of glory without the cross of shame that precedes it. He didn't want to endure pain in Jesus' behalf—and he certainly didn't want Jesus to suffer in *his* behalf. Peter was having another **“Mount of Transfiguration”** moment that day.

“But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. “Get behind me, Satan!” he said. “You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.” When Peter drew Jesus aside to censure Him, Jesus knew that His nemesis, the devil, hid behind his words.

So He was compelled to rebuke Peter before the others so that they, too, would realize how serious Satan was in his desire to derail Jesus on the *Via Delarosa*. Despite Jesus' clarity about His impending Passion, the disciples remained largely clueless about the eventual goal of His mission. They didn't yet grasp that His glory was **“not to be served, but to serve, and to give and to give his life as a ransom for many”** (Mark 10:45). Did Peter just stop listening once he heard something he didn't like? No, that never happens. Did he misunderstand Jesus' words? No, Jesus **“spoke plainly.”**

Whatever Peter brought to the table wasn't even up for consideration as far as Jesus was concerned. Like Peter—and the others—we find ourselves correcting God at times when His actions don't square with our idea of how things should be. It's no wonder, then, that Jesus so publicly and powerfully **“rebuked”** Peter. He turned it into a **“teaching moment”** to instruct His children of every generation about the true cost of discipleship. We need to realize that there can be no crown of glory without the cross of shame and suffering—not for Him, and not for us! So, **“he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.’”** What does our Master mean by self-denial and cross-bearing?

At the Fall, our first parents stepped out of a God-centered life and put *themselves* at the center of their own lives. Every human being since—*save One*—has followed suit. Whenever we sin, we're saying, in effect, **“I know better than God what's in my best interests.”** Pride is the basis of all sin. It's cosmic treason, punishable by death. When we consider the cross and realize that we should've been the ones on it, our self-rule abates. How can we gaze upon that ugly scene—the brutality and the blood—knowing that it was the penalty we deserved for our treason, and still maintain a prideful spirit? No child of God can walk away from the cross determined to remain on the throne of his or her heart, after seeing the result of such a tragic choice. No believer can willfully abuse such mercy. Or can we?

Yes, we can—and often do. The vestiges of our prideful treason remain, even after the Holy Spirit has led us to trust in the sacrifice of **“the Lamb of God”** (John 1:29) as the ransom for our soul. We trample God's mercy underfoot, out of ignorance or habit, struggling with our self-will all the while, because our sinful flesh still wants nothing to do with Jesus—and it's a tenacious bugger! That spiritual tug-of-war even raged within the Apostle Paul. He confessed: **“I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing ... What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?”** (Rom. 7:18b-19, 24). Praise God that His Spirit led Paul to the only answer! He wrote: **“Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!”**

That's why Jesus tells His disciples: **“Take up your cross.”** Luke adds the word, **“daily,”** in his Gospel. Not once, at our first glimpse of Calvary. Not occasionally when we feel a particular need to repent. Daily! If we live by pride daily, as descendants of Adam and Eve inevitably do, we need to undo pride daily. And nothing undoes pride like the cross of Christ. It reminds us that our remedy is not simply to try to do better, but to die to ourselves and be resurrected with Christ. The cross and vacant tomb are the highest examples of God-centeredness.

They motivate us to die to sin and live for Him. Jesus went on to say, **“For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?”**

So, what'll it be? Me, myself and I or Jesus and His life-giving gospel? Will we pursue the passing things of this world, and forfeit our priceless souls, or pass on the things of this world, and **“seek first [God's] kingdom and his righteousness”** as Jesus urges us to do in Scripture, trusting His promise that **“all”** the earthly **“things”** we need in order to survive **“will be given to [us] as well”** (Matt. 6:33)? Jesus makes it clear: we have a choice. Will it be door #1 or door#2? The timer's ticking. The play clock's winding down. If you want to grasp just how precious you are to God, consider what Jesus endured to redeem you. The value He placed on you is so high that He suffered and died on the cross to secure your pardon before God's throne. The Apostle Peter wrote: **“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of**

life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Peter 1:18-19).

“What can anyone give in exchange for their soul?” Nothing. Nada. Zip. Zero. The psalmist wrote, “No one can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for them—the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough—so that they should live on forever and not see decay” (49:7-9). Only Jesus could “redeem the life of another” and “give to God a ransom for them”—a “costly” ransom; a “payment” that adequately satisfied God’s justice for us. And Jesus’ subsequent, triumphant resurrection guarantees our own resurrection when He returns. He promises each one of us individually: “Because I live, you also will live” (John 14:19). What a blessed hope we have in Jesus! With that in mind, He concludes our sermon text with a strong warning: **“If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.”**

So, who will it be—Jesus, or me? Will I choose the fleeting pleasures of this life, or the everlasting treasures of the life to come? Will I swap my immortal soul that Jesus bought with His own blood for the “human concerns” that He “rebuked” Simon Peter for? May God’s indwelling Spirit enable us to give the right answer to that question, for today and for each day that remains for us here on earth. Amen.