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St. Barnabas Episcopal Church  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Lent/Year B  
February 25, 2018  
Text: Mark 8:31-38

Have you ever found yourself in the middle of a situation where you don't know whether to excuse yourself or suggest to others that they excuse themselves to go and work it out? Think of going on an outing with a couple of your friends and they have a kind of 'disagreement' and before you know it, there is that awkward tension. The air is as thick as pea soup. You don't know whether to try to somehow ease the tension or change the subject. You sit there hoping that no one else heard what was said or saw what was done. And you pray that whatever "it" is, that it will go away and go away as quickly as possible.

Poor Peter. He got called out in today's gospel and generations have tried to make sense of it. His Friend and Teacher had put him in his place.

Just a few short verses earlier Peter had answered a question that Jesus put before his disciples. Who do people say that I am? It was Peter who had gotten it right. "You are the Messiah," he answered. Peter had come to believe that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. Ever since the day he and his brother, Andrew, were called from their fishing boats to follow him, he saw miraculous and amazing things unfold. He had seen Jesus' works. He witnessed every healing and each exorcism, the dead being raised, the sea calmed. He heard every preaching and teaching moment. He saw how the crowds that followed them swelled in number. This was an awesome time and he was part of it. Everything was going so well and now Jesus laid on a bombshell for he began to teach them that he would suffer and be rejected. He would be killed, "and after three days rise again."

Like a publicity manager, Peter took Jesus aside and rebukes him. He cannot allow Jesus to kill the momentum with awful predictions.

It is not as if Peter had bad intentions. This Jesus that Peter had come to follow and to know, was the MESSIAH! This is the One who would change their world! In fact, he literally and figuratively held the whole world in his hands. This is the One who would conquer their oppressors! There is a bright future ahead for all of them. Suffering? Uh, uh! Rejection? No! Death? God forbid! These things cannot happen to you. Think of your successes, Jesus!

Mark tells us that Jesus, in the midst of his disciples, turned to Peter and said, *“Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”*

This must have stung Peter to his core and left the rest of the disciples frozen in their tracks. Here Jesus puts Peter, who has the tendency to say the wrong thing at the wrong time, in his place by reprimanding him. He calls him, ‘Satan.’ Awkward! Did Peter want to crawl into a hole in that moment? Perhaps. We don’t know. But let’s stop here for a moment.

Many theologians want us to consider what Satan means in Mark’s Gospel. It is not the illusion many think of; a being with a van Dyke goatee, horns, and tail. The most obvious allusion to Satan in Mark’s Gospel was in last week’s passage—Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness. In Mark’s Gospel, Satan is not a symbol of evil. Jesus is not suggesting that Peter is evil. Rather, Jesus is accusing Peter of putting before him a temptation, playing the role of tempter. In Mark’s Gospel Satan is the tempter—one who would offer an alternative way for Jesus, an alternative to the cross. Later on in Mark’s Gospel, the tempter will appear yet another time as Jesus is praying in the Garden of Gethsemane.

What Jesus says next though is the most thought provoking.

Jesus says, *“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.”*

This is the moment that Peter and the disciples come to realize that the future they saw for Jesus was not the future Jesus expected. That the Messiah they envisioned was not the Messiah that stood before them. Like them, we all have our own images of who Jesus is and should be about. Everything is fine when Jesus is opening the eyes and ears of the blind and deaf. It is okay when we envision Jesus taking Jarius’ daughter by the hand and bidding her, *“Little girl, get up!”* and she rises from her deathbed. And when he feeds thousands from a young boy’s lunch. That is the Lord and Savior we want to follow. But we, like Peter, are also to accept the One who would suffer and be rejected. The One who would be shamed and humiliated and fastened naked on a cross to die. And rise on the third day. For Jesus, the way things “should be” are not always the way of God. Jesus would not choose the easy way. He chose the path to the cross—that brutal instrument of

humiliation, torture, and death. He traded everything that life could have offered him-fame, power, success, military might-for the sake of the gospel.

*“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.*

It is difficult to understand the implications of Jesus’ invitation to follow him. Jesus was likely not inviting all of his followers, Peter, the other disciples and others to literally take up a cross-though some did. But he was inviting them to a life of sacrifice.

Two thousand years later, taking up our cross means something very different than it did for the disciples and the early followers of the Way. And to deny ourselves in a culture of “me first” and acquiring all we can get? Whew! We like showing off the initials behind our names and announcing our positions. We like the little power that we have. We like clinging to our stuff. We like to be seen in a certain light. As the Rt. Rev. Jake Owensby wrote in his blog for this week:

*We strain to retain the snippet of privilege or the bit of status or the meager scraps of wealth we’ve managed to grab. To do something deeper-to get to the root of things-would mean to risk losing what we already have. And so we resist giving up the way we’ve been living, seeking instead to patch the world’s fabric where it has most obvious torn.\**

The way of Jesus, self-denial, reminds us that our lives belong to God. We are not in control. God is. Jesus sets a choice before us-a choice we each have to make. Jesus bids us to come follow him and deny ourselves/lose ourselves for the sake of the Kingdom. What might that look like?

For starters, we can choose to give in a world that would rather take.

We can choose to love in a world that hates.

We can choose to forgive rather than hold on to grudges.

We can choose to act instead of insisting that things that are askew like intolerance and gun violence and hunger are someone else’s problem.

We can choose to live into the dreams God has for us or stay stuck on what was.

We can choose resurrection living or stay dead in our old selves, our old way of living. Jesus said, when we choose to lose our lives that we will save them.

Jesus invites us to come, deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow. To make choices that cost us for the sake of the Good News and of God's Kingdom. There are so many other things that are ready to tempt us, to draw our attention away from God. The way of Jesus is not comfortable. It's not easy. It is work 24/7. His way won't earn anyone a plaque, trophy or medal. But waiting for us is the One who took away the sting of death, and made life and resurrection possible. He is Jesus the Messiah, the Christ.

What will you choose? Amen.

*\*It's Time for a Revolution* in 'Looking for God in Messy Places' by Jake Owensby