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St. Barnabas Episcopal Church  
17<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost/Year B/Proper 19  
September 16, 2018  
Text: Mark 8:27-28

In the Name of the one, true, living God. Amen.

Last week we heard how an unnamed Gentile woman caused Jesus to reconsider the reach of his identity and his mission on earth. And now today we have another difficult lesson as two friends, Jesus and Peter, seem to be squaring off on each other over another case of identity.

In this corner we have Peter. Peter who in Mark's Gospel, left his fishing boat along with his brother Andrew to follow a man who simply said "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." Peter who would be a part of Jesus' inner circle.

And in this corner we have Jesus the Wonder Worker, who no sooner is recognized by Peter as the Messiah, sternly rebuked him with words that would cut him to the quick. "Get behind me Satan."

We come to this part of Mark's Gospel when Jesus and his disciples are about to change course. Up until now Peter and the other disciples have witnessed the wonderful and miraculous things Jesus was doing. Already the religious leaders were plotting against this young upstart who taught with authority in synagogues and in nearby towns and villages. Still massive crowds were following them at every turn. The possessed were being released from their demons. Thousands have been fed and roaring seas were calmed. The sick, lame, and deaf were being healed. And just recently he has healed a blind man and tells him "don't even go into the village." Jesus has built up quite the reputation. So when Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do people say I am?" there is some uneasiness behind his question. There is unsaid tension about what people were actually saying and what Jesus knew about himself. Still he listens and then finally asks, "Well, who do *you* say I am?"

After what seemed like a long stretch of silence, Peter got the nerve to speak up. This Jesus that Peter had come to follow, know, and love was the Messiah! He got this part right BUT...BUT Jesus is not rejoicing in Peter's revelation. For throughout all this time Jesus has kept his messianic identity to himself. Jesus

knew full well what it meant to hold the title of Messiah. His definition of Messiah was vastly different than that of the crowds. For the crowds, the children of Israel, were expecting a Messiah who would come reigning with military and political might. With him the revolution would begin and Rome and all their oppressors would finally be toppled. Jesus knew he was the Messiah but the kind they had hoped for. And Mark tells us Jesus sternly ordered them not to tell anyone.

There is supposed to be “good news” somewhere in this lesson. After all, that is what the word “gospel” means. But the “good news” is not yet found because now Jesus begins to give them his definition of what ‘Messiah’ means. For Jesus it means that he will be judged, suffer, and die.

What Jesus is saying is all too much and Peter takes him aside. We don’t know Peter’s exact words but we can imagine something like: “Wait a minute. Hold up! This is not what is supposed to happen. No, no, there is a bright future ahead for you! For us! Cure more of the sick! Multiply more loaves and fish! Speak words to rouse our spirits and hearts! Teach us more about God and the kingdom! But come on Jesus, to accept being accused when no wrong has been done? To suffer and be killed? God forbid it! The Conqueror is not supposed to be conquered!”

Rebuking Jesus did not bode well for Peter. And Jesus quickly turned and rebuked him saying, “Get behind me, Satan!” Ouch!

And Jesus is not done.

This “take up your cross” stuff is not holding back anything either. Jesus tells his disciples and the crowd more than once, that they are to take up their cross and follow him. “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.” (At this point it is important to remember that Mark’s audience was being persecuted. And persecuted to the point of death.)

Again and again we are reminded that if we want to follow Jesus, we too, are to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him. Hmmm! In this day and age how willing are we to deny ourselves of anything? We live in a culture that shouts out ‘Entitlement!’ One that says “Me first” and “I want the same good stuff that you have and maybe a little bit more.” And we certainly don’t like to be told we

are going to suffer. And who likes pain? Yet Jesus instructs us to deny ourselves and take up our cross.

In our entrance hymn this morning we sang:

*I have decided to follow Jesus,  
I have decided to follow Jesus,  
I have decided to follow Jesus  
No turning back, no turning back!*

*Though no one join me still I will follow,  
Though no one join me still I will follow,  
Though no one join me still I will follow,  
No turning back, no turning back!*

*The world behind me, the cross before me,  
The world behind me, the cross before me,  
The world behind me, the cross before me,  
No turning back, no turning back!*

To do this, to truly follow Jesus, it seems that each one of us must ask ourselves the key question in all of Mark's Gospel: "Who is Jesus to *me*?" It is a question that no one can answer for us. I might share who and what Jesus means to *me* but that may not apply to you... Our answers may change again and again during the course of our lifetime. And how we answer will determine how we live out our discipleship as followers and as a community of faith.

But if we say that we follow Jesus, sisters and brothers, it means living our lives differently than that of the world. It means living the way of Jesus who thought that being in relationship with others, loving others, serving others, and putting the needs of others before his own was important. It means living the way of Jesus who chose not to take the easy way out but instead stood in the trenches with the marginalized and those who nobody else cared about. It means living the way of Jesus who made it a point to call out injustice, tyranny, cruelty, and hate. To follow Jesus means living the way of Jesus who showed compassion, forgiveness, and mercy to the greatest and the least, to neighbor and to stranger. It means living the way of Jesus who was willing to deny himself and take up his cross and give the ultimate sacrifice so that so that you and I and the rest of the world may be released from the bonds of sin and death and experience life everlasting and have it abundantly.

The way of Jesus, the way of discipleship, is not easy and it is not without cost. But it is so worth it to see and experience more than a glimpse of His presence and His Kingdom come right here, right now and in the age to come. And this my friends, is Good News!

Who do *you* say that Jesus is? “Is he merely *the* Messiah? Or is he yours?”\*  
Are you willing to follow him? Amen!

\*taken from “Living the Question” in “Journey with Jesus”, an essay by  
Debie Thomas, posted 09 September 2018.