

## **Lent 2 B 2018**

Dove of Peace Lutheran Church

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[Mark 8:31-38](#)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Friends:

Jesus was crucified by the Romans in the year 30 of the Common Era. Give or take a few years. Some say the year 33. The books of the New Testament were written across decades, from around the late forties until the year 100 or beyond. So basically, the New Testament was written twenty to 75 years after the crucifixion of Jesus, depending on which book of the New Testament you are reading. Mark's gospel— today's gospel reading— was written 35 to 40 years after Jesus was crucified.

At some point while these books were being written Peter was executed by the Romans in Rome. Almost certainly under the emperor Nero. Paul's letters are the earliest part of the New Testament. And they were written while Peter was alive. The gospels came later, and were written after Peter's death. To the extent that Christianity had a human leader in the fifties or sixties, that leader was Peter.

So Peter was significant. Significant for the Church. Significant for Christians in general. But also: significant in the minds of the people who were writing the various books that we now call the New Testament from their various perspectives. And in the New Testament, Peter always comes through as flawed. He is sort of an everyman who seems to give in to his impulses. He is *human*. Most of the twelve— the original disciples— are presented by the various authors as *human*. In some instances bordering on buffoons. Peter is singled out with really colorful stories. Including our first reading today. We read: "*Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.*" Really? Peter took Jesus aside and tried to set him straight.

That's really astonishing. There is a crowd around, and Peter didn't want to embarrass Jesus. So he took Jesus aside.

Maybe they turned their backs on everyone and walked a few steps away. Peter's trying to be discreet. "*But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter.*" So Jesus pushes away from Peter's discretion. Peter tried to politely correct Jesus. Mark's wording is specific: Peter *began* to rebuke Jesus. But Jesus did not *begin* to rebuke Peter. He finished the job.

So in a very short passage you get a really tense, profound confrontation between Jesus and the man who would become a pillar of the Christian religion. And the man who is writing down this very passage— the man we know as Mark— already knows who Peter will become and how

Peter will die.

In the four verses preceding today's gospel, Peter realizes and acknowledges that Jesus is the Messiah. The Christ. Good for Peter. So far. Then Jesus lays out what it means to be the Christ. (1) undergo great suffering, (2) be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, (3) be killed, (4) after three days rise again.

This is Lent, the forty days in which we spiritually prepare for the death and resurrection of Jesus during Holy Week four weeks from today. So Jesus is explaining what is going to happen during Holy Week. And Peter takes him aside and begins to rebuke him. Jesus is wrong, according to Peter. This isn't what it means to be Christ.

And in response to Peter's assertion, Jesus calls Peter "Satan." "*Get behind me, Satan!*" We heard last week that Jesus was in the wilderness for forty days tempted by Satan. So Satan means something to Jesus. Satan is not just a bad guy, not just a villain in a Marvel comic. Satan is the force, the agency, the personality that tempts us to turn away from God's way. And God's way is the way of the cross.

The cross means self-denial. Self-sacrifice. Or more precisely and more biblically the *death* of the self. And Peter does not want to hear that, or face that, or think about that. Because in the words of Jesus, "*you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.*" There's that word. *Human*. Peter is human. You and I are human. Jesus in his temptation is human. We want to preserve self, glorify self, secure self, expand self, hang onto self. Because that is human. But that is not the way of God. That is not the way of Christ. That is not the way of the cross.

The way of the cross as expressed in the words of the so-called prayer of St. Francis: *it is in giving that one receives, it is in self-forgetting that one finds, it is in pardoning that one is pardoned, it is in dying that one is raised to eternal life*. We relinquish our self. We forget our self. And that does not come easily. Or naturally. Because like Peter, we are setting our mind on human things, not God's things.

So this is indeed a very troubling and difficult thing. It is often skewed and distorted by people who want to dominate, to manipulate, who distort the Christian message so as to make others weak. The way of the cross is not masochism. It is self-sacrifice, self-forgetting that leads to new life. Jesus lays it out today: (1) undergo great suffering, (2) be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, (3) be killed, (4) after three days rise again. There is that resurrection at the end. Peter begins to rebuke all of it. But Jesus pushes on.

And not only Jesus. As I said at the beginning of this sermon, for the people who write these words— like the evangelist that we know as Mark— for the writers and the ones they were writing to: Peter had already grown into a great leader and had himself suffered an execution at Roman hands similar to the execution of Jesus. I think that's the missing part of the story. We are all

like Peter. Human. A little bit too much about our self. Our agenda. Our image. Our credit.

But Peter, because of the love of Christ and because of the power of the Holy Spirit eventually died to himself, and became a servant leader one who was willing to pay the ultimate price for the truth and for God. What we see in today's gospel is only part of the story. The most difficult part of the story for most of us. The realization that we must let go of self and recognize suffering and loss as part of the price paid by God— part of the price paid by *us*— to make room for grace, for love, for beauty, for freedom. In our gospel acclamation this morning, we were confronted with Paul's words on this matter. Good words to take with us on our journey through Lent. From the end of his letter called Galatians. Paul wrote: *May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world is crucified to me, and I to the world.* Amen.