

## Mark 8: 27 – 38

As we work our way through the earliest Gospel we are following with Jesus and the apostles as Jesus moves through his earthly ministry. He had appointed the twelve, they had followed him, worked with him, prayed with him and been taught by him. Did they know who he was? They had been sent out by him to minister and now they are back with him. Today's gospel is situated immediately before the Transfiguration. In the Transfiguration it will be more apparent that Jesus is more than Messiah – he is the Son of God. But for today we are dealing with his messiahship. There is a major shift in the teaching of Jesus going on. It is shifting from the present and moving towards the passion, death and resurrection. This is to be the fulfillment of his ministry. This is his ethos, his teleology - his reason for existence.

In the first section he is walking to Caesarea with his disciples. He is getting a sense from the disciples who others think he is. The answers are varied. He is getting the disciples to think about this as well. Peter says 'the Messiah', the anointed one. Peter understood that Jesus was not just another prophet though he certainly was a prophet. No he is the Messiah, the Christ. Peter, though recognizing Jesus as the Messiah doesn't understand what that means. This is very natural. If we understand the 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish concept of Messiah then Peter's response is understood. Not all Jews believed in the coming of a messiah but those who did expected a great priest or a great and mighty military, political leader who would lead the people to freedom and rid Palestine from the yoke of Roman rule. This messiah should create a new Davidic Kingdom on earth centered in the Jerusalem temple. What Jesus was proposing made no sense. He is calling for a major shift, a paradigm shift in our perception of power and victory. Jesus understands that his earthly

suffering and death is coming and it is time to prepare his followers. This is just not what a 1<sup>st</sup> century Jew like Peter and the others expect. It will be even more difficult after Jesus horrible and terrifying death for the Hebrew scriptures tell us –cursed is he who hangs on a tree. Prior to his conversion this certainly got Paul in a great indignant uproar.

Jesus, rather sternly, corrects Peter. The way of Jesus and the Father are foreign concepts. This divine way of living is radically different than their current experience with the world. The human way is different. Look at their world reality. The Roman or Imperial peace, the Pax Romano, claimed peace, justice, salvation and a universal rule, but how? Through violence, war, domination and deterrence by torture and even death by slow, agonizing, humiliating crucifixion. All this in the name of peace and unity. Has this method been completely abandoned by humankind? Are we truly in a new and different age than 1<sup>st</sup> century Rome?

God's redemption of the world, on the other hand, is through the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus wins our victory by absorbing violence instead of perpetuating a violent overtaking of the world.

In Matthew's later account of this same story Peter is not rebuked but praised for being 'perceptive' of Jesus' messiahship. But here in Mark, Peter and the other disciples need to understand – Jesus has come to reverse the normal. Jesus is the complete shift. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:17 – if anyone is in Christ there is a new creation, everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new. All because of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

But what will it mean to us to be a new creation by the death and resurrection of Christ. Jesus please explain this to us. In the gospel, Jesus does go on to tell the apostles and through our reading today

to us. 'If any want to be my followers, let them deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me.' What does it mean to take up the cross? If we are in Christ and a new creation what does that mean?

Our faith requires sharing in the death of Jesus. That is, death to the things of this world, to our needs over others, possibly even to death itself for the sake of Christ. This conforming to the crucified Christ calls for a self-giving, loyal dedication to God and a self-giving love of neighbor. The response of faith, to carry the cross, is not cerebral or just a mental acknowledgement. It is active participation in the death and resurrection of Christ – a real sharing experience.

Sometimes I want to share in the resurrection part, the victory part but not the suffering, the total giving part. This is impossible. They go together, they are inseparable. It may be difficult, it may be painful at times, it may be counter cultural but we are being asked nothing more than was asked of any Christian after the resurrection of Jesus.

Faith and carrying the cross is not a one-time experience but an ongoing, active reality. Faith, hope and love are not emotions but actions. For Paul, faith hope and love are activities that we do. They are not nouns but verbs of action. We are participating in the continued activity of the crucified but risen Lord! To carry the cross means to live this reality, to share in this crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.