

Sermon 2-25-2018
Second Sunday in Lent
By
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For us to fully grasp what this journey to the cross means, we have to know who the one is who is taking the journey. Today, we are going to understand that a little better, and find out what that means for us. It all comes from the 8th chapter of Mark.

Mark 8:27-38

The first section that we're going to look at is famous. You've heard it many times before.

read 27-30

This is Peter's famous proclamation of exactly who Jesus is. Messiah and Christ basically mean the same thing. It means savior or liberator. And in Peter's usual role as the mouthpiece for the disciples, he is making this confession. Jesus is believed to be the one who will save, who will liberate, his people. But let's ask a good Lutheran question here: what does this mean? What does that saving look like? The next section shows how there are two competing *definitions*.

read 31-33

Jesus makes the distinction between divine things and human things. Human salvation, human freedom, looks a lot like changes in political or societal oppressions. When the disciples would say Messiah, they envisioned someone who would throw off the shackles of the Romans, and they would be free again, liberated again. But Jesus has bigger fish to fry. He's not thinking primarily of human liberation, but the freedom that will last for eternity, the liberation from the power of sin and death. In order to accomplish that higher mission, he's got work to do. All of that work is listed in verse 31. That's why Peter responds so harshly to Jesus' proclamation. Can't save a nation if you're going to die. But Jesus has more people in mind.

And he has more people in mind than just the disciples. He wants to free others, and he's going to use these disciples to do it. And they're going to do it the exact same way he is.

read 34-35

It's a famous passage, but it is the last one that we want to hear. The sin that lives within us doesn't want to hear "deny yourself." Yourself is the only one we can count on, right? Yourself is what needs to be kept satisfied, kept going. And that's by any means necessary. You need the food you want, the people you want, the situations you want, the congregation you want, the community you want, the nation you want. Advertising tells us this constantly: you are not all you can be if you don't

by our product. And we want to be all we can, of course. We want to gather all to us that we can. We want to be denied nothing. All of us, from the youngest to the oldest, if not for societal pressure, would throw a rolling around on the floor, kicking and screaming fit if we didn't get what we wanted. And here is Jesus, telling us to deny our very self.

Then there's step two: Take up your *cross*. Um, you know what they do with those, right? They kill people. People die hanging from those things. Why would I want to do something like that? I don't want to have anything to do with death. And Jesus' step three is even worse: *follow me*. He's carrying a cross. He's going toward the place where you die. He will die there. And he wants us to follow? Everything that he is saying is the exact opposite of what we want to do. And it makes sense based on verse 35. Jesus declares to us that if you want to gain your life, you'll lose it, but if you lose it for the sake of the Gospel, you will find your life. And he's got some logic behind this.

read 36-37

There are two levels here to this conversation about *possessions*. First, in verse 36, he talks about gaining the whole world. That's the opposite of denying yourself, right, not denying yourself? You'd be rolling in everything this world has to offer. You've got the peaceful world around you, the loving family, the houses and cars, the influential friends, the comfortable congregation. Sounds pretty nice, right? Sound pretty familiar? But while we're so focused on all those things that can make our life comfortable, we lose our soul. In fact, many of those comforts are the cause of us losing our souls. When we don't have to be concerned about anything, we don't have to be concerned about anything, and that extends to the things of God. We become focused on human things, and not the concerns of God. And sometimes, we realize this, but then the first move becomes verse 37. We try to appease God with the possessions of the world that we gathered for ourselves. It's those huge gifts that we give, not because we want to, but because we hope that God will have mercy on us because we gave. Or maybe it's our belief that we need to act a certain way because then God will love us. God has created everything in the first place; why does he need what you've got? There is literally nothing you can exchange for your life, so what God calls us to is to give it away. Losing your life is literally giving life to your neighbor. That life is found in the word of Christ. What does Jesus say about this word?

read 38

Our *shame* is about us: how will we be perceived? How will people react? Will people like me? Who cares? The thing that prevents us the most from proclaiming the name of Christ in the world is us. It's our sin, it's our worry, it's our laziness, it's our excuses. If we are going to claim Christ as our savior, that has ramifications. That has things that will happen in this world. It's not going to be comfortable. It's not going to be privileged. It's going to be hard. And if anyone knew this, it's Paul. *2 Timothy 2:1-13*

Watch where Paul starts in this passage. He's starting in the right place, with the soul, and not any possession of our own.

*****read 1-7*****

In verses 4, 5, and 6, Paul has some interesting metaphors. Soldiers try to please their commanding officer, athletes compete by the rules, and farmers receive a first share of the crops. What is pleasing to God? What are the rules of the world? What grows out of the work of God in the world? Verse 3 has the answer: suffering. The cross that we carry is not for our benefit, but for the benefit of others, and for the benefit of Christ's kingdom. Luther speaks of this sort of suffering in a way that is really striking. He says this, "All Christians should know they won't be spared from suffering. But it should be the kind of suffering that is worthy of its name. It should really hurt us and weigh us down, such as a serious threat to our possessions, bodies, or lives. We should really feel it, for it wouldn't be suffering if it didn't hurt. Moreover, we shouldn't choose our own suffering, as some people do. It should be the kind of suffering the devil or the world sends our way. We would want to be spared of it, if at all possible. Then we need to hold on tight and reconcile ourselves to this suffering. As I have said before, we have to suffer so that we will become more and more like Christ. It cannot be any different. Everyone will face Christ's cross and suffering. If you know this, then the suffering is easier and more bearable for you. You can comfort yourself by saying, 'Well now, if I want to be a Christian, I must wear the colors of the team. Our dear Christ doesn't give out any other clothing for his side. I must endure this suffering.'" It is Christ that is our endurance. Paul says the same thing.

*****read 8-13*****

We can go through *anything* because of Christ. We can go through losing our place in society. We can go through hearing our worldview challenged. We can go through losing possessions, or health, or limbs. We can go through even death, because Christ has already been there. He's going there, with his cross. And we are following. AMEN.