

## **February 28, 2021. Rev. Katheryn McGinnis**

Creator God,

We cannot hear the trees growing—seeds pushing up through the dirt into the sun. And we cannot hear a single drop of rain, missing one in the many. We cannot hear the weight of people’s grief, a burden that so often is silent. And we cannot hear when hearts are changed, but you can. You hear it all. So once again, we come to you with bowed heads and hopeful hearts, asking that you would lend us your ears.

Help us to hear as you hear so that we can live as you lived. We are listening. Amen.

Our scripture for this morning comes from the gospel of Mark, chapter 8, verses 31 through 38. Listen now for the word of the Lord.

*Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup> He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup> But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” <sup>34</sup> He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup> 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. <sup>36</sup> For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? <sup>37</sup> Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? <sup>38</sup> Those who are ashamed of me and of my words<sup>[b]</sup> in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”*

The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

When you look at history – and the radically different cultures and peoples that have inhabited every time in human history, its amazing how some things are just universal. So universal, that when reading this scripture, I knew instantly when I read that Peter took him aside (him being Jesus) that what ensued next could not be good.

I played soccer throughout my childhood and high school and a bit in college so my mind immediately jumped to that feeling during a game, when you know you’re about to be subbed out. Being pulled aside. It usually happens after you mess up a few times too many and the coach just gets this look of

disappointment or anger on their face and then they call someone from the bench up to be subbed in....and you know it's for you. Once you're out of the game, they pull you aside and it's usually not good.

No, being pulled aside when you're in a group.... throughout the ages and different cultures, it never seems to be a good sign. But what's particularly amazing about this in today's scripture is that Peter pulled aside JESUS. Not the other way around. It makes my stomach drop to the floor to think I would ever have the audacity to pull aside Jesus.

But to understand why Peter did it, we have to look back at the verses leading up to today's scripture. Jesus is with his disciples and asks them, "who do the people say that I am?" And they answer John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets. Jesus then asks, "but who do YOU say that I am?" And Peter answers, you are the Messiah. Then Jesus tells them to tell no one, and you're left kind of assuming that he agrees, he's the Messiah.

While there would have been some diversity in the Jewish community during this time about who the Messiah would be or what he would do, it's safe to say that first century Jews expected that the Messiah would "deliver them from Roman oppression." And Galilee was the hotbed of revolutionary activity. So, Jesus' Galilean disciples probably believed the same.

Yet Jesus tells them that no. the messiah, the son of man will not come in power and might and glorious victory.

Instead, the son of man must suffer. Must be rejected by elders, chief priests, scribes (His own people). And he must die.

Can you image being one of Jesus' disciples? A Jew living in occupied land, oppressed by the roman government. And here is your messiah. Right in front of you. And then he tells you he's not going to deliver you from oppression. Instead of that, he's going to die.

At this point, I don't think it matters much to you that he is going to be resurrected - why should the messiah NEED to be resurrected? Why would the Messiah die when his people needed him?

It's not so crazy to think Peter would pull him aside and rebuke him. He was desperate. Desperate to cling on his own expectations of what the messiah should be. What HE thought he needed the Messiah to be.

Over and over again, and especially here: Christ teaches us that we must throw out what we think we know about a Messiah, we must throw out what we think we know about God.

Because Christ shows us who God is. It's a contrast Luther calls the theology of glory verses the theology of the cross. The theology of glory is built on **how we expect** God to act in the world. The theology of the cross is **God's self-revelation** in the weakness of suffering and death. The theology of glory confirms what we want in a God.

The theology of the cross contradicts everything that people imagine God should be. For Luther, to know God truly is to know God in Christ, which means to know God hidden in suffering. God contradicts everything we know, everything we expect of the divine. So how do we follow God?

Christ tells us plainly "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

*<sup>35</sup> 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."*

Disciples too must suffer. This would have been relevant for Christ's disciples at the time – they were a persecuted a community.

But what does that mean for us, 2000 years later. How do we deny ourselves?

Denying oneself, Joquette Bassler writes, at its most basic level means removing oneself from the center of one's concerns, relinquishing status and power in favor of service to others. Putting others before self.

One of my favorite books is the novel Silence by Shusaku Endo. It's about Jesuit missionaries who go to Japan in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

It's a work of fiction, but its closely based on historical figures and historical events. Christianity was on the outs in this time in Japan.

Japanese Christians were so heavily persecuted that all remaining Christians had gone underground. They met in secret, or didn't meet at all. All foreign missionaries had left or been killed, except for one. He was a Jesuit priest named Ferreira, who was rumored to have apostatized. To have renounced his faith and God. When word of this gets back to Europe, the Jesuits don't believe it, and 3 Jesuits volunteer to smuggle themselves into Japan and find him.

When they get there, they see the horror of what life was like for a Japanese Christian. Slowly, they are all discovered and killed except for one. He's captured and brought to the capitol and there he meets Ferreira, who has apostatized, and urges this young Jesuit to do the same. But the young priest refuses so the Japanese leaders start killing and torturing Japanese Christians before him. And they won't kill him – the Japanese are smart. They know that if

they were to kill this young Jesuit, he would become a martyr and fuel the Christian movement.

No, they want him to renounce Christianity, to humiliate him and the religion and god he serves. So the killing of innocents continues until the young Jesuit accepts his fate, and knows what must be done.

On the morning he will publicly renounce his faith and apostatize, Ferreira comes to him. And when the young priest has his doubts and does not want to do it, Ferreira tells him: surely Christ would have apostatized for them. Christ would certainly have apostatized to help men. For love Christ would have apostatized. Even if it meant giving up everything he had.

And as the young priest leaves to publicly apostatize, Ferreira tells him that what he's about to do is the most painful act of love that has ever been performed.

Denying ourselves – putting others before self – to pick up our cross and follow Christ, will not be what we expect. It will not be glorious, or easy, like a theology of glory.

No – to take up our own cross will lead us to such unexpected places as a priest denouncing the god he dedicated his life to. All out of love. But it's there - in those unexpected places where it seems turned upside down – that is where we meet Christ. The theology of the cross.

Lent is a time to turn, to change, to repent.

As we journey to Jerusalem. As we get ready to see Christ suffer. To reject Christ. To see him die. We must take seriously the call to pick up our own cross. To humbly let go of expectations.

To stop pulling Christ aside. when we define Jesus ourselves, when we have those expectations – we're pulling Jesus aside just like Peter.

Instead, we must deny ourselves, and see where Christ leads us.

For love, Christ died on the cross and suffered and gave up everything. What have we given up for him?

Thanks be to God. Amen.