

Second Sunday in Lent  
February 25, 2018

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**1 Corinthians 1:18, 26-29**

**Mark 8:27-38**

### **A Strange Kind of Glory**

*He rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”*

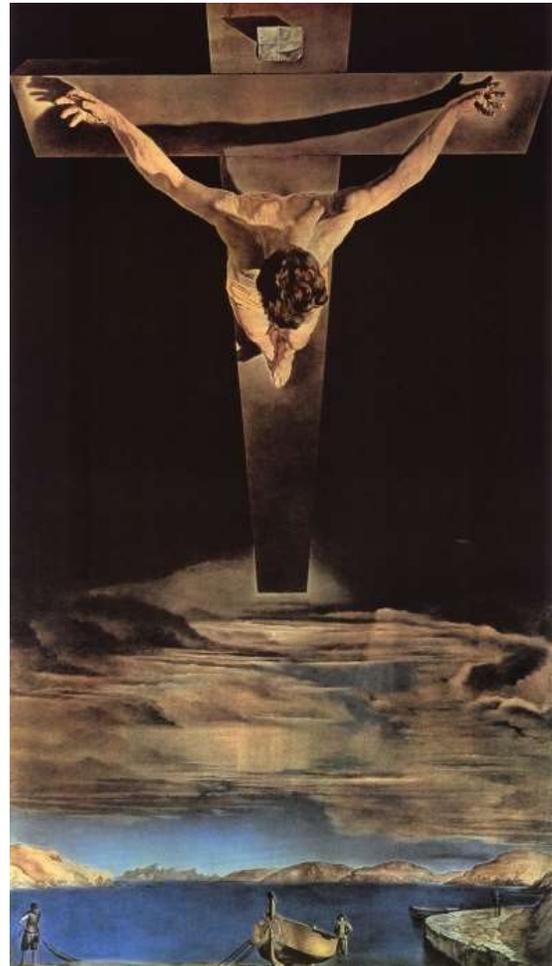
– Mark 8:33

The gospel reading for this second Sunday in Lent is from Mark, chapter 8. Jesus has been traveling throughout Galilee, teaching, healing, and calling people to follow him. He’s stilled a violent storm and fed 5000 with 5 loaves and two fish. In spite of all they have done and seen, his disciples are still curious and confused over who Jesus is. So he takes them on a retreat, up to Caesarea Philippi, a Roman city 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee.

That’s a long way to walk, but it was necessary for them get away. According to New Testament scholar, Douglas Hare, this “is the watershed moment of Mark’s gospel.”<sup>1</sup> From the very beginning Mark has implicitly presented Jesus as the Messiah who has to suffer, die, and be raised. Now, in these verses, the wonderful, terrifying truth is fully revealed. Listen to Mark 8, beginning at verse 27:

*Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?”<sup>28</sup> And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.”<sup>29</sup> He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.”<sup>30</sup> And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.*

*<sup>31</sup>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.”*



Christ of Saint John of the Cross, by Salvador Dali

<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 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.

O God, in your service we find perfect freedom. We bow before you, aware that without your Holy Spirit we would surely lose our way. Tell us now what we need to hear, and show us what we ought to do to reflect the light of Jesus Christ our Lord, in his strong name we pray. Amen

When our kids were little, there was a retired minister in our church named Chester Armentrout. Chester used to give quarters to all the kids. They would swarm around him each Sunday with his roll of quarters that were intended for the offering plate, although I'm sure many of them never made it there. Imperfect though it was, Chester's system went a long way toward teaching the kids of that church the meaning of sacrifice and the blessedness of giving.

One weekend, I was on vacation. My sister and her 3 kids were visiting. We took all 5 children and went to worship in a different church. Sitting five in a row, they were stair steps, little towheads, 12345. Caroline, age 3, sat next to me. She had never stayed all the way through grown up church, and so it was a bit of a challenge. ... Okay it was more like worshiping with a baby tiger on my lap, but -- this is important, parents and grandparents -- worship is learned behavior. Your kids need practice. They need to see you and others at worship regularly, so they can learn.

So somehow we made it through the hymns and prayers and even the sermon (lifesavers and coloring books), and then it came time for the offering. True confession -- I forgot about the quarters for the kids. Honestly, I was thinking, "I give sacrificially to my own church, I can even skip my own offering today." Mistake! The usher handed me the offering plate, and I reached to pass it down the row. Caroline -- who was now standing on the pew next to me -- reached in the offering plate with both hands and grabbed two big giant handfuls of cash and checks.

The usher, watching this, nearly had a heart attack. I gave him a look that said, "Well, isn't this what you are supposed to do when someone passes you a plate of something?" My sister and the older kids pried the cash and envelopes out of Caroline's determined hands.

I should have remembered the quarters.

Here's the point. We want to teach our children to be generous and faithful. We take vows swearing we will do that every time a child is baptized here. We promise to teach them God's truth, holy things, educate them -- through the example of our lives -- that it is more blessed to give than to receive. We want to give them Kingdom values, or, as Jesus put it, to "set their minds on divine things, and not only on earthly things."

This week I went through the gospels and counted all the times Jesus asked people to follow him. It's 18 times by my count. He speaks about this over and over and over again. He tells us that we must take up our crosses and following him faithfully, sacrificially. He speaks of it more than just about anything else.

But what does it mean for us today? We can't deny or ignore our context. We don't live in first century Palestine, -- not that the first disciples' context was any easier, it may have been hard -- but that doesn't change the fact that we are raising our children in an environment where the values are not biblical values. And we are marinated in that contradictory culture. Every day our kids have to navigate that system of values which is all about striving for personal glory, validation and success. "Win! Win! Win!" That's the message they constantly hear: Accumulate more and more stuff -- more shoes, more experiences, awards, acceptances. We can't ever seem to get enough! Tragically, many of our young people buckle under the relentless pressure of it all.

There is something seriously wrong.

We hear Jesus say that we need to be willing to set all that aside. We hear him say we need to lose our lives for his sake, deny ourselves, give it all away. But are we listening? Sometimes it sounds like he is speaking a foreign language.

What does it mean to follow Jesus? Does it mean going on a mission trip instead of a ski trip? What about that new car? Do I really need it, or is my old one okay for now? Is working on a cure for cancer following Jesus? I sure hope so. How about teaching? Engineering? National security?

So what does it mean to follow Jesus in *this* life, in these times?

Those are the questions that came to a head in today's reading. When Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" That's still the main question, isn't it? And Peter nailed it. He got an A+. He said: "You are the Messiah, my Savior." Then, the second Jesus started talking about what that means: sacrifice, self-giving, even suffering and rejection, Peter backed away. "Look Lord, I'm not a fanatic; I'm not into any of that crazy stuff." Giving instead of taking? Losing instead of winning? Humiliation? A cross? No way! What kind of a crazy Messiah would claim he has to suffer and die?

A Savior is supposed to make you successful...make you triumphant. At least that's what Peter thought, that's what the prosperity gospel preachers teach -- and they have the private jets and Rolls Royce's to prove it. I read that Joel Osteen's house cost \$10.5 million. That is a seriously long way from "birds have nests, foxes have holes, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."<sup>ii</sup> "The prosperity gospel is the very popular belief that God grants health and wealth to those who have the right kind of faith."<sup>iii</sup>

This week I read Kate Bowler's, *Everything Happens for a Reason and Other Lies I've Loved*. Bowler is a 35-year-old Duke Divinity School professor who is an academic expert in prosperity gospel. She is also a wife and mother of a 2-year-old, and she has stage IV colon cancer. The book sounds like it would be a real downer, but it's not at all. Bowler has an amazingly bright spirit, with a great sense of humor and a tested faith. She provides a list of things to say and NOT to say to cancer patients and others who are suffering...things like, "Everything happens for a reason." She also thoroughly debunks the idea that we can avoid pain and loss.

Jesus not only teaches us how to live. He also shows us how to die.

The Reverend Billy Graham was a great example of that truth. I had the opportunity to meet Dr. Graham years ago when our church helped to sponsor one of his crusades. He was a warm and gracious person who could easily have gone the way of the \$1000 haircut. Instead he chose to live a modest life in Montreat, and travel the world inviting people to meet Jesus, inviting, always inviting. That's something we should all emulate.

His glory was in sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, and he did it with passion. He made some mistakes and bad calls (don't we all), but he helped millions to come to faith. Grant Wacker said this in the *Christian Century*:

[Graham] provided a compelling vision of peace—peace within, peace with neighbors, and peace with God. His ministry helped us see that no matter how badly we had messed up our lives, Christ offers ... a second chance.<sup>iv</sup>

Life is hard, and sometimes when you do it right, things get harder, not easier. Here's a photo of over 100 airline pilots and employees who came to Florida last week to support one of their own, a United pilot whose daughter was murdered in the massacre at Parkland's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School.

It would have been so much easier for them to look away, and to thank God that their own children are safe and sound, but they did not. What strength they embody! What a witness!

Did anyone see the movie *Selma*? The theme song from that film is titled *Glory*. Common and John Legend describe the cross-carrying agony of those non-violent civil rights warriors – including my own former congressman John Lewis, who was beaten nearly to death for taking part in a peaceful protest. The song describes their glory.

They say, "Stay down," and we rise up  
Shots, we on the ground the camera panned up  
King points to the mountain and we ran up  
One day when the glory comes.<sup>v</sup>



It's not the winners' kind of glory, I know. It's a strange kind of glory, a glory filled with confrontation, struggle and sacrifice. Still they sing of glory. Why? Because that is precisely where we find true glory – and for that matter, success and power and strength and security – in those moments when we surrender our claims to success, power, strength, and security, and glory<sup>vi</sup> and give ourselves away.

“Anyone can be great,” Dr. King wrote, “Anyone can be great, because anyone can serve.”

Let me be clear: I'm glad that my niece grabs for all the blessings of this life with both hands. She's not a toddler any more. She is a beautiful young adult now who still approaches life that same exuberant way. Here's what her mom and dad and others have taught her so well: you may make a living by what you get, but you make a life by what you give. What you give to God is most precious of all.

C.S Lewis concludes his magnum opus, *Mere Christianity* with this.

The principle runs through all of life from top to bottom. Give up yourself, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favorite wishes every day, and death of your whole body in the end: submit with every fiber of your being, and you will find eternal life. Keep back nothing. Nothing that you have not given away will ever be really yours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself, and you will find ...only ...loneliness, despair, rage ... But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>i</sup> Douglas R. A. Hare, *Mark*, Westminster John Knox Press, 1996, 97

<sup>ii</sup> Luke 9:58

<sup>iii</sup> Kate Bowler, “Death, the Prosperity Gospel and Me” *New York Times*, February 14, 2016

<sup>iv</sup> Grant Wacker, “Billy Graham’s Legacy for Christians and Otherwise” *Christian Century*, February 21, 2018

<sup>v</sup> John Legend, Common, “Glory” *Selma*, 2015

<sup>vi</sup> David, Lose, “The Theory of Everything” [Davidlose.net](http://Davidlose.net)