

02/25/24

Genesis 17:1-7 & Mark 8:31-38

What to Do With Shame

What stood out to you from the Gospel reading Tom just read?

A while back when I read the passage as staff was collaborating for worship planning, what stood out for me was the shame Peter must have felt throughout this encounter with Jesus. Even rereading the passage again as I was thinking about what to focus on for today—I feel for Peter. My heart goes out to him. There’s almost a public shaming going on in this passage and I’d like for us to sit with that shame and maybe even put ourselves in Peter’s shoes.

To give context, just before the passage Tom read, in Mark 8 verse 30 Peter is sternly ordered by Jesus to keep his mouth shut and tell no one Jesus is the Messiah. We learn Jesus went with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way asks his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” The disciples give Jesus all different names of who people say Jesus is. Jesus then asks more pointedly for his disciples to tell him who they say Jesus is. Peter answers Jesus’ question honestly. “You are the Messiah.” Jesus sternly orders Peter and the disciples to tell no one who Jesus is. This is the first time Peter’s told to shut up.

Then, we pick up the passage we heard Tom read at verse 31. Jesus teaches, sharing with the disciples that he’ll undergo great suffering, he’ll be rejected by the elders, the chief

priests, and the scribes, and he'll be killed, and after three days rise again. Jesus is saying all of this openly for all to hear.

Peter then takes Jesus aside, out of the open and in private rebukes Jesus. Peter isn't calling Jesus out in front of everyone but rather the passage says, Peter takes Jesus aside to rebuke him. We may surmise that Peter silences Jesus in response to Jesus' rebuke of Peter. Perhaps Peter's thinking—*Jesus, you just told me not to talk about you openly as the Messiah and now you're doing just what you told me not to do so I'm going to remind you to hold your tongue.*

Then the passage in verse 33 takes another twist as Jesus again rebukes Peter, this time upping the ante saying, "Get behind me, Satan!" Peter is rebuked (once again) by Jesus and in this rebuke is likened to Satan. Jesus also accuses Peter of setting his mind on human things. At the end of the passage and conclusion of chapter 8 all who are listening and are participating in Jesus' ministry are called to think about ways in which we may find ourselves ashamed of Jesus or ashamed of the Gospel message or embarrassed and feeling shame. We read that if we are ashamed of Jesus then he will be ashamed of us when he returns in glory.

There's a whole lot of shame being bandied about in this passage. What are we to do with shame?

In Mark's gospel up to the point where our passage for today begins, Jesus' teaching emphasized his authority and power, for example, he cast out demons, he healed, he cured diseases, and he even tamed nature. Jesus introduces a new kind of teaching that begins in Mark 8:31 and this teaching relates to explaining the necessity of Jesus' suffering and death. Jesus turns his disciples away from Galilee, where Jesus has experienced great success and popularity, and faces his disciples toward Jerusalem, toward the cross, on which Jesus will die.

I don't think Peter necessarily misunderstands Jesus. Peter understands what Jesus has to say but he doesn't like what he hears. Perhaps Peter was prepared for a great military leader, for a new prophetic voice, and for the divinely ordained king who would set things right. Peter was, shall we say, not looking for a Messiah who suffered and who would be rejected by the elders, chief priests and scribes, and who would be tortured and killed and so, Peter lets loose on Jesus. I wonder if Peter is looking to elevate the successful and popular Jesus or healing and miracle working Jesus; while downplaying or silencing the suffering, cross carrying Jesus.

In response, Jesus shames Peter saying, "Get behind me Satan!" and take your place in the rear because you don't understand what I'm saying. Jesus says, let me make myself clear so all may understand.

(PUT ON SCREEN)

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 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. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? 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.” (Mark 8:34-38)

None of this makes sense to Peter. Or, perhaps he’s trying to make sense of it in the way he knows how to do that. We have the advantage of two thousand years of Christian faith, and we still don’t fully understand what Jesus means in these verses. We know that the cross was followed by the open tomb but don’t we at times find ourselves like Peter equally resistant and hesitant to talk about the cross, Jesus’ sacrifice, suffering, and death?

What does cross carrying and losing life for Jesus’ sake mean for you and me today?

In his commentary on this passage New Testament scholar Lamar Williamson says this about taking up one’s cross.

"The cross Jesus invites his hearers to take up refers not to the burdens life imposes from without but rather to painful, redemptive action voluntarily undertaken for others."¹

¹ Lamar Williamson, Jr. Mark. Louisville: John Knox Press, 1983, p. 154

To "take up one's cross" is "to be prepared to endure severe suffering, even to the point of death."² It's likely that in its original context, this saying of Jesus was a call for the disciples to be ready to die for the sake of Jesus and the gospel. There's also the notion of "taking up one's cross" as a picture of the criminal carrying the cross through the city, rather than the actual crucifixion so that the act of carrying the cross was a public display of guilt resulting in ridicule and scorn from others. With this understanding, to take up one's cross could mean, to "be willing to publicly display our faith and suffer the consequences that such a display might evoke."³

Some of us in a Peter-like state of confusion may make the mistake of talking about crosses we carry. Cross-bearing isn't something that falls upon us because we're mortal and live in a sinful world. We negate the power of taking up one's cross when we say, *that's just my cross to bear—I've got a bum knee*, or *that's just my cross to bear I've got to care for my sick spouse or aging parent*. When we reduce cross carrying or cross bearing to little more than performing acts of kindness toward other people or putting up with difficult situations, we risk transforming our faith into just another religion that celebrates good things, but which avoids the difficult truths about Jesus and faithfulness to God. A cross is something we pick up because we desire to follow Jesus and we choose to follow Jesus. It is not something that just happens to us. The cross we are called to bear or to take up is not exactly the same as Christ's cross. Our crosses are our

² Lowe and Nida in their Semantic Lexicon

³ Stoffregen. *Exegetical Notes at CrossMarks Christian Resources*. www.Crossmarks.com
Proper 19, Year B

own and are shaped for us by our lives and by the call of Christ upon our lives.

When this Gospel was first written, Christians were literally in danger of losing their lives for their faith. They were tempted to deny Christ to save their lives. This is still true for many Christians today. Persecution of Christians is alive and well. According to the latest report on worldwide Christian Persecution (published 1/17/24 in Christianity Today): “Almost 5,000 Christians were killed for their faith last year. Almost 4,000 were abducted. Nearly 15,000 churches were attacked or closed. And more than 295,000 Christians were forcibly displaced from their homes because of their faith. . . . The latest annual accounting from Open Doors ranks the top 50 countries where it’s most dangerous and difficult to be a Christian. The top 10 countries are, North Korea, Somalia, Libya, Eritrea, Yemen, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sudan, Iran, and Afghanistan.”⁴

“The cross of Jesus claims our lives usually in terms of discipleship and sacrifice rather than actual death. To be Christian means that we will allow the world to see the cross in the way that we live out our lives.”⁵ It means allowing our lives to reflect, in word and deed the validity of our confession of faith.

In his commentary on this passage Princeton Seminary Professor C. Clifton Black writes, “Christian faith is not a life-style choice; it is a vocation to never-ending struggle. By lying about Jesus and the truth of the gospel, we deny the truth about ourselves. Rejecting

⁴ “The 50 Countries Where It’s Hardest to Follow Jesus in 2024” by Jayson Casper. Christianity Today.com 1/17/24

⁵ George M. Bass. The Tree, The Tomb and the Trumpet. “A Dreadful Declaration.” CSS Publishing, Co., INC. 1984

the Son of Man, desperately trying to save our own lives, we lose ourselves — just as he assured us we would (8:35-37). Only by giving ourselves to others as Jesus gave himself for us (10:45) will we ever find ourselves.”⁶

Friends in Christ, if we believe that God alone makes the difference to human flourishing and that faith in Christ sets us free, then we’ve got to figure out what to do with shame. Let’s make that part of our Lenten journey over the next few weeks. Let’s allow the world to see the cross in the way we live our lives.

Let’s pray, Amazing Creator of ourselves and of our world, we thank you that you reveal yourself in the events of human history. We thank you that you have shown yourself in Christ, who shared our human life, walking the path of obedience all the way to the cross. May we also die to ourselves and live for the world, through the empowerment of your Spirit and may we carry your cross for all to see. Amen

#718 Take Up Your Cross the Savior Said (4 verses)

⁶ “Commentary on Mark 8:31-38” by C. Clifton Black. Workingpreacher.org 2/25/18