

September 16, 2012

Shepherd's Grace Church

Splinters

Mark 8:27-38

²⁷Jesus 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?"²⁸ And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."²⁹ He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah."³⁰ And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

³¹Then 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.³² He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.³³ 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."

³⁴He 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.³⁵ 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.³⁶ For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?³⁷ Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?³⁸ 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."
(Also Read James 3: 1-12)

This week will mark the celebration of Rosh Hashanah in the Jewish Faith around the world. Messianic and Traditional Jewish Synagogues will gather at the sound of the Shofar! The blast of the trumpet will signal as of old an invitation to all Jewish people of faith to come back! The call is to repent of sin and return to God! We can learn a lot from this feast as Christians. Acts of repentance and an intentional turning to the Lord are always appropriate, but it is easy to forget God's grace; to take it for granted and go on about our daily lives as if we somehow deserve this incredible act of mercy!

Instead of taking the act for granted, I suggest we read our New Testament message of salvation and make our own acts of repentance. Just a few verses from the New Testament might guide our thought process.

Romans 3: 20

²⁰For "no human being will be justified in his sight" by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.

Ephesians 2: 8

⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—

Titus 2: 11-12

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Mark 8: 34

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No one is justified by the law. The law only recognizes those who break it. The law only makes us aware of our sin. Instead, we are saved by grace through faith. We are not justified by our works but by the gift of God. God’s grace appears to us in the person of Jesus Christ. His teaching invites us to be humble, giving up our own passions to live in obedience, not because it earns us salvation but because salvation has been given freely. Once we understand the great love of God in Jesus Christ, we can only respond in one way. We can only serve our Lord who has given everything for us! We must, as he says today, take up our cross and follow Him!

It is easy to speak without knowing. James, Jesus half-brother tells us this in today’s Epistle lesson. He cautions that the tongue can be a great evil if we allow it to be. Jesus, however wants us to know. He wants to teach us Himself so that as we spread the word of his grace, we get it right. This understanding of holding our tongue until we are knowledgeable of the facts is exactly where the Gospel of Mark meets us this day. As we read the scripture, it becomes apparent that there are things we do not know. What is it we must learn? How can we rightly divide this Word to unpack the wisdom of God that is held within these verses.

Today in Mark’s message, Jesus asks a question and gives a command. The question: Who do you say that I am? The command: Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me! But when we respond to the first, he strictly orders our silence. Look at the passage. Peter gives the response we all want to give...right? He tells Jesus clearly and precisely, “You are the Messiah!” Immediately after that, however Jesus strictly orders the disciples to tell no one about him. Why?

Last week, as I was preparing this message I read a story about a commercial airline flight from New York City to Philadelphia. Shortly after take-off, the pilot began experiencing difficulties with the plane. He worked desperately with ground control but nothing they tried worked. Finally, after trying everything, he stepped from the cockpit into the cabin of the plane. He told the passengers that the

plane was going down. He said I have done all I can but there is nothing that can prevent it. He told them there were five parachutes and that he hoped to see them safely on the ground. With that, he opened the cabin door and stepped out into the sky.

Immediately there was pandemonium in the passenger cabin. One man jumped up and said, "I am a world class surgeon. There are patients who will die without my skills. I am taking one of the chutes." With that he grabbed a bag, strapped it on and stepped out of the plane. Another man stood up and said, I am a world class attorney. I am currently involved in class actions suits that will affect the lives of hundreds of poor people around the world. Without me, the firm will not be able to complete the legal action necessary to win these cases. With that, he strapped on a bag and stepped out into the sky. At once, a third person stood up. She said, I am a world renowned academic. I have written 9 books already and am in the process of completing the 10th. My work is groundbreaking research that will help millions of people better understand themselves. I am taking one of these chutes. With that she strapped on a bag and stepped out. Then a fourth person stood up. He said, "I am one of the smartest people on the planet. I have an IQ so high I can't even tell you the number. The world should not be deprived of all I have to offer!" At once he grabbed a bag, strapped it on and stepped out into the sky.

Now, there were only two passengers left. One was a pastor, the other a young man. The pastor said to the young man, "you take the last chute. I know where I am going and you have your whole life ahead of you. Do not worry about me." The young man looked at the pastor in a calm and somewhat sheepish manner said, "Pastor, we still have two chutes left. The smartest man in the world strapped my backpack on and jumped without a chute."

The lesson here is that whether you are speaking, or whether you are jumping, you should always know the truth about what you have! So what is the truth we need to know from Jesus message to his disciples today? Why did he forbid them to say anything about him?

Let's back up to the beginning of the passage. Jesus is walking with the disciples Caesarea Philippi. We need to know that this is a group of Roman villages. They are under strict Roman rule and garrisons of soldiers are stationed there to insure that there are no violations of Roman law. Pax Romana is the rule of the day. This means that as long as a person goes along with Roman rule, there will be no problem. I have tried Pax Dickson at my house a time or two. It doesn't really work out that well. There is always insurrection and rebellion. That is exactly what happens in Caesarea. There had been rebellion. Additional soldiers were sent into the village. More than 2000 Jewish citizens had been crucified. As Jesus and his disciples walked through the streets they would have been very aware of the rebellion and the way it had been put down.

Peter and the other disciples knew with whom they were traveling. They knew Jesus was the Messiah. The difficulty Jesus had was with what they knew about Messiah. Many in that day were hoping for a Messiah who was a liberator, one who would restore Israel to its own self-determined nationalistic state. Many others were hoping for a Messiah who would solve the economic woes of an impoverished and struggling lower class. Hopes of who or what Messiah would be were many and varied. The

disciples knew that Jesus was Messiah, but they wanted him to be their kind of Messiah. They did not know what was in the pack as they prepared to jump into this human struggle.

In the church today, I think we often make the same mistake. We preach and teach of a prosperity Jesus. We teach that what we want is what we should ask for as we pray and that our will is the same as God's will in our world. We make our lists and we bow our heads but do we understand the truth about Jesus?

After Jesus forbade the disciples to say anything about him, he began to teach them about who he was and what he was about. His rejection and death at the hands of the wealthy and the powerful was not because they didn't like the way he looked. It was because the wealthy and powerful believed his message would destroy their world. Jesus message is about the salvation of all people; the justification of the poor and the lame as well as the whole and the healthy. That message negates the power of those in power and allows for all to have a voice in this world.

When Peter began to rebuke Jesus for talking openly about his judgment by the world, Jesus turned and said, "Get behind me Satan." In other words, do not bring your prejudices and preconceptions into our ministry. Peter had set his mind on the things of this world and not on the things of the Kingdom. Peter wanted economic freedom, prosperity, military victory or any of a number of other things people were expecting of the Messiah. Jesus wanted the disciples to know the truth. The truth is that Jesus came to proclaim is God's call to return, to repent, and to be redeemed by the Author of Life, the one true God who calls to all people, then as well as now. Jesus message was a message of Rosh Hashanah. He is the trumpeter on the wall proclaiming, "Come back! Come back!"

We cannot proclaim that Jesus is Messiah until we know this truth about him. Jesus silenced his disciples not forever, but for a moment until they could learn the truth about him. He then called his disciples and all people to him and said, "if you want to follow me, deny yourself, take up your cross and then follow me." When we understand God's willingness to forgive our sins, take away our guilt and free us from our own self-oppression, we then have the opportunity to accept his grace! As we said earlier, his grace is given freely, and when we accept, we can do nothing less than follow him!

It is this response that is our cross. Our decision to follow is the burden we bear. Jesus wants us to know this is not a light burden. He says take up your cross there in Ceaserea because he knows it will evoke memories of those crosses that lined the streets. He knows many will remember the screams of agony and pain; the splinters from carrying the cross beams. He wants to be certain we know that ours will not be an easy decision to live with; that ours will be a decision that we should instead die with. Death will be to our old, selfish, worldly selves. Life will be to the sense of purpose that comes from loving others as we love ourselves. That is the truth of Jesus.

Our cross cannot simply be our obligations in this world. Our cross cannot simply be the way we pay our bills or obey the laws. Laws never justify. We are justified by love. The love of God who cared enough to send his only son is the love that justifies our life in this world. Our cross is this same love; a love given freely and without reservation because we know the truth! Jesus Christ is that truth! Jesus Christ is that Way! Jesus Christ is that life! In him we live and move and have our being!

James says that not all should teach for the tongue can be a great deceiver. But now you should teach. Jesus no longer wants you to remain silent. You know the truth and it is part of your cross. The truth is the love of God that now lives in those of us who choose to follow Him. The opportunity is to share that love with everyone. Sound the shofar! Stand on the wall! Call out to the world! The Messiah has come for you! Renew, Repent, be Redeemed and be set free! Amen!

Next Week: Scripture: Mark 9: 30-37 Message: *Holy Hospitality!* This week we explore the depths of our human frailty. The disciples want to know who is the greatest. Jesus wants them to know something else entirely! As people, we also want to know where we stand. Where do we stand in relation to our neighbor? Where do we stand in relation to our God? The answers are here! Come and Worship! Come and See!