

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobnier, Illinois
Lent 2B
February 28, 2021
Mark 8:27-38

Who Is the Christ?

And 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?" 28 And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets." 29 And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ." (Mark 8:27-29 ESV)

In the Name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world.

Today we hear our Lord Jesus ask a most important question, and our eternal salvation depends on how we answer. When Jesus asked the disciples who other people thought He was, they answered, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets." And if any of those were true, we would still be lost in our sins. Then, when He asked them who they thought He was, Peter said, "You are the Christ." But when Jesus started to tell them what was going to happen to Him, Peter didn't want to hear it. He rebukes Jesus. And then Jesus says, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." You see, what Jesus had said didn't fit with Peter's idea of who the Christ is and what He should do. And there are many in our day who don't really know who Jesus is and have a wrong idea about Him too.

Pastor Matthew Richard wrote a book entitled "Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?: 12 False Christs." He identifies 12 erroneous views of Jesus: The Mascot, The Option among Many, The Good Teacher, The Therapist, The Giver of Bling, The National Patriot, The Social Justice Warrior, The Moral Example, The New Moses, The Mystical Friend, The Feminized, and the Teddy Bear. He theorizes these false christs come about because our society exalts everyone's free choice which leads us to individualize and personalize everything, including the Jesus we want. Or they reject what Jesus says about Himself and redefine Him according to their own wants, desires, values, and worldview. They want a Jesus according to their own hopes, dreams, and desires, making Him into an idol of their own imagination.

This happens because as Jesus told Peter, "You are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." Indeed, who can blame Peter and the other disciples being troubled when Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again." They had finally realized who Jesus really was and He began to talk about suffering and being killed. It didn't make sense. If He really was the Messiah as they thought He was, why was He talking about dying. It went against everything they had thought about the Messiah. And they certainly don't seem to have heard the part about His rising again after three days.

So it doesn't really come as a surprise that Peter, who had earlier made the bold confession that Jesus was the Christ, would now rebuke Jesus for talking about suffering and death. As the apparent spokesman for the disciples, Peter simply said what everyone else was thinking. He didn't want to hear anymore about this suffering and dying stuff. After all, if Jesus was dead, how could He do what the Messiah was supposed to do? What good could come from that?

But Jesus, upon looking at the disciples and knowing that Peter had expressed their thoughts too, rebuked Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." You see, Jesus recognized that Satan was at work once again tempting Him to avoid suffering and fulfilling His role as the Messiah. And this time, rather than confronting Jesus directly, he used one of Jesus' closest friends. So it was only proper for Jesus to rebuke Satan – and Peter.

Now Jesus' rebuke is good for us too. For quite often, we too, "do not set our minds on the things of God, but on the things of man." We certainly don't like to hear such things from our Lord. We don't like to hear about suffering any more than the disciples did, especially when it's our own. And yet, we do well to listen closely to what Jesus says:

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 35 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. 36 For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? 37 For what can a man give in return for his life? 38 For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." (Mark 8:34-38)

Now all this is certainly contrary to the way we want to think. For men say, "Me first. Look out for number one. I want things my way. I deserve it." Or "I'm a good person. I haven't done anything really bad. I'm sure I'll go to heaven because I'm good. Besides I have a loving God. He's my buddy." But Christ says, "deny yourselves and take up your cross." That means to give up false notions of our own goodness and worthiness. That means we must die – to ourselves, to sin, to the devil, to the things of man.

But we don't like to hear such things. The way of the world is to enjoy life and avoid suffering and unpleasantness. The things of man are to grab all the gusto today, for tomorrow we die. The things of man are concerned about this life only and not at all about the life hereafter. But Christ says, "we must take up our cross and follow Him." And, "What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life?" (Matt. 16:26). Indeed, "Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life." (John 12:25). Jesus is calling us to die so that we might live.

Yet, since we have in mind the things of man, we don't see good in suffering, especially when it's our own. And yet, it's God's thing to bring glory through suffering. That's what Jesus' life was all about. For God's deepest desire was that the crown of His creation would live with Him

forever. And when man listened to Satan and disobeyed God, God came seeking man in order to save him. He came searching for Adam and Eve in the garden and He came to earth as one of us to seek and to find us. Now God becoming flesh certainly isn't a man-thing. It's only a God-thing. For only God would dream of sending His Son to become man. Only God would dream of suffering and death as the way to life. Only God is so concerned for our soul (and our body) that He was willing to die in our place. Only God would bear our shame so that we can have His glory. It's a God-thing that Christ's total self-denial and self-sacrifice atoned for the self-centeredness of human existence. It's a God-thing that Christ is the only way to heaven.

The things of God are most certainly not the things of man. Indeed, "His ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts" (Is. 55:8). For His ways and thoughts are so much higher than ours that we find them hard to believe. Whereas man is more concerned with the body, God is more concerned for our total well-being, body and soul. That's why He sent His Son in the flesh. For God is most concerned that we spend eternity with Him. And He's concerned that we realize that life even now.

So, who is the Christ? We don't look to our own ideas for an answer, but listen to Jesus who had to "suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again." That's who Christ is. And He is still among us as we come to the font and the altar. For that is where He brings us before the things of God. And by the gracious working of the Holy Spirit in our lives through the water, the bread, the wine, and the Word, we have in mind the things of God. For the things of God are forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. And these gifts enable us to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus who is the Son of God in human flesh who suffered, died, and rose again so that we may have life. God grant that we believe in our hearts and confess with our lips this Christ and Him alone and thus become ever less mindful of the things of man and ever more mindful of the things of God. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener