

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Lent 2B
February 25, 2024
Mark 8:27-38

Set Your Mind on the Things of God

And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must 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. 32 And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." (Mark 8:31-33 ESV)

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

In this holy season, as we travel the road of repentance to the cross and our Lord's resurrection from the dead, we are once again called to set our minds on the things of God. And do we ever need to hear this. For, more often than not, we, like the disciples, set our minds on the things of man instead of the things of God. We are more concerned with the things of this world than with the world to come. We are more interested in the latest books, movies, music, sports, amusement, entertainment, and experiences than we are with God's Word and Sacraments. We would rather watch the latest offering on the screen, no matter how big or how small, than read, hear, or talk about the things of God or receive His gifts. We wouldn't think of missing our child's sporting event, or having him miss it, but don't think twice about skipping the services of God's House or Bible class. We think the ways of the world are better than God's ways as He tells us in the Bible. We don't think God's Word does, or can do, what it says. And, more directly to the point, we don't see how suffering, any suffering, is good – for ourselves or for Christ.

That's why the disciples were so troubled when Jesus said the unthinkable when He "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." And especially since, "He said this plainly." He didn't use parables. He didn't tell them stories. He told them in plain, simple, straight-forward language what was going to happen to Him.

But the disciples didn't like what He said. And who can blame them? 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 Peter had confessed, 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." That's certainly something no one wants to hear! Yet, 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 and bearing a cross 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. I go to church once in a while. Besides I have a loving God. He wouldn't send me to hell." But Jesus says, "deny yourselves and take up your cross." That means to give up false notions of your own goodness and worthiness. That means you must die – to yourself, 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 way of the world is to have things your way, and 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). The answer is nothing. Even if you have

everything the world has to give, it won't do you any good when you die. You can't take it with you. 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, God brings 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 God's way that Christ's total self-denial and self-sacrifice atoned for the self-centeredness of human existence. God's way is that Christ is the only way to heaven.

The first Christians often suffered and died because they were not ashamed of Christ. Many of the early martyrs died because they firmly believed that by losing their life for Jesus' sake and for the sake of the gospel, they would save it. In fact, for many it was a badge of honor to suffer for the gospel. Paul certainly did that. He suffered a lot because he was "not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16). And people are still suffering and dying for the sake of the Gospel today. Oh, that we would have such a faith!

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 when we hear the things of God, we believe because God also sends us His Holy Spirit. And as the Spirit leads us to the font and the altar, 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. God grant that we become ever less mindful of the things of man and ever more mindful of the things of God to the glory of His holy name, now and forever. Amen.

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

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