

## Lent 2B 2018: Mark 8:31-38

Have you ever entered into the middle of a conversation and made assumptions about what was being discussed? Well, today's text actually is part of a bigger conversation, and I think it's important we back track just three verses.

Right before this reading, was a conversation between Jesus and the disciples, in which he asks them what the locals are saying about him. They respond that some are rumoring that Jesus is actually John the Baptist, or Elijah, or one of the prophets. And then Jesus asks, **BUT who do YOU say I am?** And Peter says the most profound and vulnerable thing; he openly confesses that Jesus is the Messiah.

This was huge! This is the first time Jesus is recognized as being the Messiah! – openly!! And Jesus doesn't disagree with it. He confirms it.

➔ Now we enter into our text today, which is the continuation of that conversation....

Peter has figured out the true identity of Jesus as the Messiah, and he's all excited! Jesus can probably see the growing excitement too. He sees the wheels turning in Peter's head. But he realizes that Peter is thinking a different definition for Messiah than what he is claiming. Jesus quickly gives an explanation of what being the Messiah will mean for him.

"I will be rejected by all the elders and chief priests and scribes. They will turn against me. I will go through great suffering. I will die. But after three days I will return." Jesus teaches and speaks this all very openly, without any hiding of the truth.

I can only imagine the faces of the disciples at this point in the conversation. I would think if the Bible could be written as a screen play here, it would have the words A LONG DEEP SILENCE HANGS IN THE AIR. I wonder if the disciples all stopped, and looked around at each other, mouths slightly dropped open in awe. Then they eye Peter with that certain eye (you know that "eye") which means "Come on! You need to take him aside and talk to him." There might even have been elbow jabs to prompt Peter to take some action.

So Peter does. He takes Jesus aside, and "rebukes" him. He questions and calls Jesus out on his definition of Messiah.

The Bible doesn't share this conversation, but I wonder what it would have sounded like:

"Ummmm...Jesus? Can I have a minute with you? Help me understand, you just said you're the Messiah, but now you're saying you're going to suffer and die?! We all know the promised Messiah is here to set a new world in order, God's world, the covenant to be renewed. The Messiah is going to be the new ruler, even the Romans will not be able to touch you! Death....rejection? What in the world are you talking about??!! You will

conquer them all!! And we will be here right beside you Jesus, to stand with you in your triumph!"

Maybe that's not how the conversation went, but I'd like to think Peter probably tried to explain his understanding of what a Messiah was. Maybe Peter thought the sun or the wine had gone to Jesus' head. I don't know. But it's clear Jesus' idea of Messiah and Peter's and the disciples' were not on the same page.

### **"Get behind me Satan!"**

Can you imagine what that must have felt like? To loudly and boldly be rebuked by Jesus...and in front of everyone no less. But the worst – to be called Satan!!

I've had my fair share of being rebuked or being corrected. Maybe you have too? Sometimes privately, sometimes publically. It never feels good. It can sometimes feel shaming, humiliating, and carries a sting with it. But that's more a reflection of a hurt ego than the needed truth being openly spoken.

There's a quote which goes, "Open speech is not popular speech. Open speech is frequently offensive speech. Open speech is often met with opposition."

➔ The truth is hard to hear....and sometimes, harder to speak.

Jesus loved Peter dearly, but just as we heard last Sunday in Satan tempting Jesus in the wilderness, Jesus here recognizes Satan trying to tempt him through his disciple Peter; a temptation to be the ruler and conqueror of this world and not a Messiah who suffers and dies. Maybe Satan will get his way and win Jesus by using Peter to speak his worldly promises of glory and triumph.

But Jesus sees it as the deception which it is. Jesus knows what a real Messiah is called to do. What he is called to do. And he calls Satan out. In fact it's the same Greek word of rebuking which Jesus has used to cast out demons and of Satan in the wilderness.

Jesus calls Satan out. He speaks the hard truth for all to hear. For you and I to hear.

Peter is comfortable enough in his relationship with Jesus to take him aside and rebuke him. He felt for sure there must be a misunderstanding of what Jesus taught that the Messiah would be. Peter was vulnerable. But he was vulnerable to his own ego and what glory would mean to stand beside the next world conqueror. He was focused on the ways of the world.

"Get behind me Satan!" "You have not set your mind on divine things, but on human things."

The sting of truth woke up Peter. It woke up all the disciples. It wakes us up too.

➔ Hard truths are found in vulnerable places of intimacy in relationships.

I wonder how often we need a wakeup call from what the world's systems tempt us into believing.

Today, one's identity is important; who one aligns themselves with, or how one is perceived.

The identity of being prosperous, strong and influential is what is ideal. Being vulnerable and authentic in showing our brokenness is not at the top of the list of traits to share openly. Yet, that is the truth.

We are broken.

That's part of our identity as Christians. We are broken, we are vulnerable, and we are in need of a divine relationship which understands our suffering in this world which regularly tempts us. That's why Jesus had to set Peter straight.

The world did not need another conqueror to rule and repeat the cycles of human ways. The world needed a Messiah who understood the reality of the vulnerable human ego and of the human desperation for a divine relationship of truth and love. And we still need that Messiah today. We don't need more conquerors to rule. We need more open truth tellers.

If our identity is in being a Christian, we must realize that it is not a free ticket to heaven, or to prosperity, nor a bypass around the hardships of life.

Being Christian, turns us to face and look straight at the cross as our identity.

In Jesus' time this was a shocking truth to openly claim. Jesus proclaims his death on a cross as what his identity truly meant, and asked others to follow him there.

You can only understand who Christ is if you understand where he is headed. In the cross God shows openly that there is no place God will refuse to go in the pursuit to love and redeem us.

Today, we are accustomed to the cross; it is a distant symbol; we have domesticated it. We don't fear persecution for being a Christian or wearing it openly in America. In fact, Lent is the one time where we mark our foreheads with a cross and then go to a grocery store without embarrassment, but rather, it causes conversation and forms community and a unified identity.

During Lent we are rebuked to redirect our focus to our daily identity in the cross.

What was shocking to openly speak about in Jesus' time, is not in our time.

- ➔ So what is shocking for us to speak openly and truthfully about?
- ➔ Where the world's systems try to change our focus to be about our egos, who calls out our Satans?
- ➔ Who rebukes us....where are we called as followers of Christ to openly rebuke and speak hard truths?

“Open speech is not popular speech. Open speech is frequently offensive speech. Open speech is often met with opposition.”

The truth is hard to hear....and sometimes, harder to speak.

- It's hard to rebuke systems which make us comfortable yet oppress others.
- It's hard to rebuke policies which fund privilege and silence minorities.
- It's harder yet, to rebuke loud voices, and allow new voices to be heard.

We live in a loud world of many big booming voices. Voices which twist us into thinking our identity is in prosperity, prestige, and reputation. But we find our identity in the open claim Christ makes as a Messiah who will suffer, be rejected by all, and flogged and killed in humiliation on a cross. And in this open truth of identity, we are also called to be open in our claims of truth into a world where there are many satans trying to weave a different identity for us.

The theology of the cross is where we clearly hear Jesus' open rebuke to Peter - and to us.

Where we realize that what unites us to Christ is our openness in claiming our suffering and God's willingness to join us in our suffering.

A God who joins in the suffering of the homeless, the refugee, the immigrant.

A God who understands the suffering of loss and grief.

A God who does not abandon those who are trafficked and enslaved.

Jesus asks his followers to start being the truth tellers against the world's systems which harm and twist truths, despite that path leading to a humiliating and shocking cross.

Speaking openly. It's what Christ did when speaking about his future on the cross.

Peter and the disciples didn't truly understand what being the Messiah meant. Jesus tells of his death on the cross three times in the Gospel of Mark, and three times they don't understand it. Three times he explains, each time with more details, and they still don't fully understand.

Sometimes, I don't think we fully understand it either. It's hard to grasp.

It's hard to grasp....A God who comes to us, in the Messiah Jesus, not to conquer with sword and armies, but to speak openly the truths which are needed to be heard. To heal and to teach about love and forgiveness. And then to not just have good thoughts and prayers about the injustices and brokenness of the world, but to actually put this unconditional love into action, - a living and dying action - a suffering action of a God who loves and forgives from the most shocking and humiliating form around - a cross - a God will that meet us in the hardest of places where truth is needed to be proclaimed.

Jesus taught and spoke openly. This is how our reading began.

May we also speak openly to rebuke the Satans of this world....even if that means hearing it for ourselves.

May we know that our journey of Lent is about facing the cross and trusting in its promise of abundant life over the deaths of this world.

And may we be more brave in living our identity as Christians in the theology of the cross, by loving and caring for all.

Amen.