

Beloved Divine One

(sermon # 2 in the Beloved series)

Mark 8:31-38

May the words of my mouth and the meditations in our

hearts be acceptable and suitable in your sight Oh

Lord, our rock, our strength and our redeemer. Amen

Today is sermon number 2 in the Beloved series for Lent, entitled Beloved Divine One. Jesus for the first time here in the gospel of Mark predicts his death and resurrection. Just a few short verses ago, Jesus asks his disciples who people are saying he is. Peter, always the first to answer, says confidently, "You are the Messiah."

In fact, yes Peter is completely correct in saying that

Jesus is the Messiah. But Peter forgets, as Peter often does, or maybe Peter is not really sure what this title, "Messiah" actually means.

Jesus explains to his disciples for the first time what it really and truly looks like to be the Messiah. Jesus tells them of the suffering, rejection, death and rising he will endure as the Messiah. Suddenly Peter strongly disagrees with Jesus and cannot accept the fact that this beloved, chosen one of God, will really have to go through such things. After all, this is the Messiah, why on earth would he be destined to all this torture and suffering?

Yet, Jesus knows, and Jesus is not happy with Peter and Jesus lets Peter know this as he says, "Get behind me Satan!" Peter is human. Completely and fully human. The disciples are completely and fully human. Jesus? Well Jesus is fully human, and Jesus is fully divine. Right here in this moment, it is evident that Jesus is fully divine. Setting his mind completely on that which comes from God, which in this case is the fact he just stated, that he will suffer death and then rise to life. This is the will for the chosen, beloved son of God. The reason God sent his beloved to the world.

Jesus goes on to tell them that any who want to follow him must take up their cross and deny themselves completely. To give their entire lives for the sake of following Jesus. "Take up your cross and follow me."

At the beginning of this Lenten season, the Reverend Delmer Chilton stated in his podcast that his theme this Lent was going to be different. Instead of giving up something for Lent, he encouraged listeners to take up something for Lent. Take up your cross. What does that look like to you? Back in Jesus' day the cross was not a good symbol. The cross was the symbol of torture and death. Take up your cross. Not an easy thing to do.

For in taking up the cross today, would mean to really stand up for those our world sees as a bit different and in our world today, that is just not always seen as cool. And who doesn't want to be cool? Well, first of all Jesus. Because for Jesus, he really didn't always hang out with the cool crowd right? He was not afraid to speak up for those the world looked down on. To really give up everything for the sake of someone else. That, I believe, is what taking up your cross looks like in our world today. Willing to suffer embarrassment, even shame for standing strong for another human being in the face of adversity. That is not easy.

Taking up the cross is not easy.

It is not meant to be easy. Jesus' life, although fully divine, Jesus' life was far from easy.

Martin Luther often speaks of the theology of glory and the theology of the cross. What Peter displays here could be defined as the theology of glory. Peter is best friends with the Messiah and Peter feels like he is in the "in" crowd, because after all, this is the Messiah. Must mean wealth, fame and fortune, and all good things yet to come, right? For Jesus and his best bud, Peter. Well, wrong. The theology of the cross is really just the opposite. Working in weakness, beside the outcast and the sinner alike is the theology of the cross.

Take up your cross and follow me. To be truly divine is to follow God's will no matter the cost. To take up the cross is to give up oneself completely for the sake of spreading God's love to the world. We are called to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Christ.

Like Peter, we are all very much fully human. Like Peter, we struggle to take up the cross and completely follow. To think that it can't be like this for the Messiah. This is after all God's chosen beloved son. In our own humanness, if we had been there that day with Jesus what would we have said after he tells of his impending pain, death and resurrection?

What would our response be as we listen to the words from the Messiah ? Not knowing yet what exactly was in store for Jesus I think we would say along with Peter of our beloved, "This can't be. You are the Messiah, God's one and only son. Surely not you. You cannot possibly be tortured and suffer in this way!" Because without knowing the story as we do now, we too, in our very human nature, would fall right beside Peter and Jesus would be saying to us as well, "Get behind me Satan." We must trust this divine one, now on a whole different level from his disciples, and yet somehow still very much fully human.

Knowing the agony will surely come and the pain will be very real, Jesus takes up his cross and asks us along with his disciples, to take up the cross as well. Trusting in this truly Beloved Divine One, take up your cross. Begin the long and sometimes very painful walk towards the cross, never losing sight of what that means. You are a follower of Christ. Forsake yourself. Take up your cross. Amen