

February 25th 2018

Scripture:

Psalm 22:22-31

Mark 8:31-9:9

“Our spiritual journey.”

Our passage from Mark’s gospel this morning is a powerful road map for Lent --- indeed it’s a powerful road map for our spiritual journey in general -
---- Lent and otherwise.

Today we embark on week 2 of Lent.

Lent that 6 week period leading up to Easter.

Lent the richest part of the church year.

Lent the most difficult season in the life of the church.

Lent the most painful season in the life of the church.

Lent the most rewarding season in the life of the church.

Lent the most powerful time in the life of the church.

Lent the most preparatory season in the life of the church.

Lent the most troubling of times.

Lent the most rewarding of times.

It almost sounds like the opening to --- “A Tale of Two Cities” --- you know that famous opening ---- “It was the best of times --- it was the worst of times. ---- It was the age of wisdom --- it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief ---- it was the epoch of incredulity --- it was the season of Light --- it was the season of darkness” ---- and on and on it goes ---- as Dickens often does ---- anybody ever actually read all of --- “A Tale of Two cities”?

But I digress --- maybe I should try reading Dickens again for Lent.

Either way Lent is kind of like the opening to A Tale of Two Cities --- it is the best of times --- and it is the worst of times --- it is the age of wisdom ---- - and it is the age of foolishness --- remember Paul speaks of the foolishness of the cross and the divine power of the cross at the same time in I Corinthians 1.

Lent is the most Christ like ---- the most Christ defining time in the life of the church.

The way we look at Lent --- preparing ---- preparing for something grand Easter --- and also preparing something grotesque --- crucifixion --- Good Friday --- defines who we are as Christians ---- it is the very heart of our faith.

Lent ---- moving towards great suffering ---- and also great triumph.

Lent ---- great pain and great reward.

Lent suffering and salvation ----- suffering leading to salvation.

The way we look at Lent is very similar to how Jesus likely looked at His entire life.

His whole life was preparation --- it was always pointing to Jerusalem ---- crucifixion and resurrection --- two sides of the same coin.

His whole life was a journey that climaxed at Good Friday and then opened up into another chapter at Easter.

Everything Jesus did ---- everything Jesus was ---- was a lead up --- preparation ----- found its culmination at Good Friday and then also Easter.

Easter signals a new season in the Church year.

Lent is really all about Good Friday.

Preparation for death and suffering.

Things we really don't like to talk about.

Things we generally like to skip over.

They're negative --- downers ---- hurtful --- painful --- not much fun at all.

But they are also a part of our spiritual journey.

A huge part of our spiritual journey.

There is no Easter without first Good Friday.

There is no empty tomb without first the cross.

The glory and the celebration comes later.

The submission and the take up your cross and follow me is for now --- and we do well to embrace it just as Jesus did.

As one commentator said about our passage from Mark's gospel today -----
 "The disciples --- in common with many Christians throughout the church's life --- want to have the glory that they can see --- without the message that they must hear ---- but the two cannot be separated."

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The glory --- of course is the empty tomb ---- Easter ---- salvation -----
 and the radiant glowing transfigured ---- and soon to be resurrected Christ.

The message of course is take up your cross and follow me.

Mark --- more than Matthew --- more than Luke --- more than John ----
 Mark is very concerned that people listen to Jesus --- not just praise Him and glorify Him but also listen to Him --- and listen to the hard stuff.

And it is hard stuff ----- not much fun at all ----- but what kind of followers are we if we only like the stuff that makes us feel good.

In verse 7 today we have God speaking from the cloud ---- and we'll get back to the cloud ----- but for now the message from the cloud is --- "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

"This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

"Listen to Him." --- is a refrain in Mark's gospel --- more than Matthew ---- more than Luke and more than John.

And the message that we are to listen to for today is ----- "Take up your cross and follow me."

As one commentator said --- it was our call to worship today ----

"Jesus uses the image of carrying a cross to illustrate the ultimate submission required of His followers.

He is not against pleasure --- nor was He saying that we should seek pain needlessly.

Jesus was talking about the heroic effort needed to follow Him moment by moment --- to do His will even when the work is difficult --- and the future looks bleak."

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That's what this passage is all about ----- following Jesus --- submitting to Him even when it is difficult and the future looks bleak.

Jesus knew the short term future looked bleak ---- Jerusalem where He was headed ---- the cross --- was bleak --- but what did He do? ---- He submitted.

In what ways do we submit to God?

Can we name an activity or approach to living in our lives right now that is a definite and clear indication that we are submitting to God?

This is the heart of Lent ---- these are the real questions that Lent asks us to ask ourselves.

In what ways do we submit to God?

Can we name an activity ---- or approach to living ---- in our lives right now that is a clear indication that we are submitting to God?

What are we doing --- is there evidence in our lives --- right now --- that shows we are putting ourselves second and God first?

This is the heart of Lent.

This is the heart of our spiritual journey as Christians.

Submission to God --- obedience to God --- following Christ.

So ---- how are we submitting to God --- how are we being obedient to God ----- how is it that we are following Christ today in our lives?

Just showing up to church isn't enough --- it's part of the picture for sure --- it's necessary ----- but it isn't the whole picture --- more is required of us ---- more is asked of us.

Jesus asks us to lose our self-centered determination to be in charge ---- and simply follow --- submit --- be obedient.

At the end of their great episode today ----- Jesus glowing radiant white on the mountain --- a foretaste of the glory to come --- Jesus instructs His disciples to keep quiet about it until after the resurrection.

Verse 9 from Mark 9 reads ---- “As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.”

“As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.” -- - simply put the glory is for later ----- now is the time for submission --- pick up a cross submit --- obey --- follow me --- Jesus has just said to them before the mountain top experience.

The disciples on the mountain today --- don't know what to do --- they are frightened even ----- as verse 6 says.

And then a cloud appears.

As people of the Word --- we know the power and the importance of the cloud ---- as soon as we hear that a cloud appeared we know that something special is happening.

In the Exodus --- and remember along with the exile --- the Exodus is the pre-eminent journey of the people of God.

We cannot even begin to understand anything about the will of God without first understanding the importance of the Exodus --- the journey in faith of submission --- humility---- obedience and trust that we must first go through before any hope of entering into the Promised Land --- heaven --- the eternal hereafter.

In the Exodus --- the 40 year journey --- the 40 years of ---- “Where the heck are we going God?” ---- God leads the people with clouds.

A pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day --- and here once again -- on another journey of submission --- trust --- obedience ---- here in another moment of confusion and fear ---- not knowing what to say or do --- here again God guides --- and speaks from a cloud.

Exodus 13 --- verse 21 and 22 read ---- “

“By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.”

God led them ----- and God never left them alone.

“Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.”

But the only way they ever got to where God wanted them to go was by following.

To follow --- means to submit in trust and obedience.

Jesus uses this image of carrying a cross to illustrate the ultimate submission required of His followers ---- akin to the Exodus.

Only after submission is there glory --- the radiant ---- jubilant --- triumphant ---- resurrected ---- empty tomb moment.

The tomb can't be empty until it is first filled.

And it is filled through a courageous act of humility submission and obedience.

What are our courageous acts of humility ----- submission ---- and obedience today?

And they are different for each of us --- but we do well to consider what are they?

How do we humble ourselves before God?

How do we submit before God?

How are we demonstrating our obedience to God today --- this past week what have we done that has demonstrated our obedience to our creator?

Can we claim with even a whiff of authenticity ----- courageous acts of humility --- submission and obedience ----- are we truly submitting in some tangible way to God's will --- or are we kind of just plugging along putting in our time waiting for the glory part of faith?

That's what Jesus is asking His disciples today in Mark's gospel.

Are you truly prepared to submit --- obey ---- and follow --- or do you just want the radiant glorious Christ on the mountain top?

What about us has to die off on the cross before we can emerge from the tomb transformed --- joining Christ on the mountain and in heaven?

What human concerns are standing in the way of our focusing on divine concerns?

Peter shows us by example today someone who thinks he knows better.

Peter is so self assured that he rebukes Jesus.

Peter so lacks --- at least at this point and at this time --- Peter so lacks any sense of humility --- submission and obedience that he begins to rebuke Jesus.

Peter is so certain that Jesus would never be rejected or killed that when Jesus even suggests the idea --- he Peter rebukes Him.

You will never have to be that uncomfortable --- or go through that ordeal --
- "I'm not going to stand here and let you talk like that" ---- Peter says.

Peter thinks he knows better than Jesus Himself --- so he rebukes Him.

But Jesus has little time to debate with Peter --- He doesn't leave Peter behind --- but He has little --- actually no time for Peter and simply says --- "Just follow Peter --- just follow." ----- actually He's a bit harsher if we're honest -- "Get behind me Satan" --- He says to Peter.

Peter your job is simply to follow me ---- right here right now --- at this time ---- you are to simply step aside --- and follow --- so do it --- "get behind me."----- Jesus says.

"But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

I can well imagine Jesus thinking oh for heaven's sake Peter --- this is not the time for thinking and defending and pretending that you know better --- get behind me and follow --- don't let Satan use you.

Get behind me now and follow because you've got your minds on all the wrong things.

Peter can't understand what Jesus is saying ---- so he tells Jesus that He must be wrong.

Who needs Jesus when you've got someone like Peter in your life who thinks he knows better than Jesus Himself?

Just before Jesus rebukes Peter this is what He --- Jesus said ---
 "He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him."

Peter cannot wrap his head around the fact that Jesus will suffer --- be killed and rise again --- he can't understand it so he starts to correct Jesus.

We've all got a little Peter in us --- if we can't understand it ---- it must be wrong --- I better correct people.

The logic goes something like this ----- "Well if I can't understand it --- and I'm no dummy --- so if I can't understand it --- it must be wrong."

Anyone ever done something like this? ---- thought because we can't understand it it must be wrong ----- we've all done it ----- I've done it ---- and we'll all do it again.

God doesn't necessarily want us to understand ---- but He does want us to submit --- obey --- follow.

That's part of our spiritual journey.

No one could ever possibly understand how the movement to eternal and full and abundant life would be all about brutal grotesque death.

And yet it is --- and it is not because it makes sense --- it is because God wills it and God chose it to be this way.

Our spiritual journey is not about intellectual ascent.

It is about submission ---- obedience ---- follow ---- get behind Jesus --- follow Him ---- as He submits --- and He obeys ----- and He gives over.

But we mostly don't want to --- because we think too much of ourselves -----
 Jesus did all that so that I don't have to.

Well what does it mean to follow Him then? --- just in the good stuff without
 also the challenges.

“Jesus uses the image of carrying a cross to illustrate the ultimate
 submission required of His followers.”

That's what our spiritual journey is all about as we enter into Lent --- and in
 general.

Submit --- obey --- follow.

This is the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ for today.

Submit ---- obey --- follow.

Get behind Jesus.

“The disciples --- in common with many Christians throughout the church's
 life --- want to have the glory that they can see --- without the message that
 they must hear ---- but the two cannot be separated.”

The glory is --- radiant ---- post resurrection ----- empty tomb Christ.

But not without also the message and reality of submission obedience ---
 humility --- get behind me Peter --- follow me.

Jesus could have told His disciples --- “Hey guys don't worry --- it's all
 going to be all right so just start partying now --- break out the pina colada's
 the chips and dip --- put all the streamers up now ----- because it's all going
 to end well eventually --- in the end Stan loses so why not just break into the
 party now --- I submit and ultimately so does Satan so you don't have to.”

But He doesn't --- He doesn't say that ----- instead this is what He says to
 His disciples as they come down off the mountain today.

After they have seen Him in all His radiant glory for the first time --- a precursor to the resurrection --- this is what He says.

“As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.”

Notice he doesn't say don't ever tell anyone --- instead it's don't tell anyone --- until after I've come back and am truly in my glory ---- you just had a glimpse of my glory --- but save it until I come back in all of my glory.

In other words --- don't break out into song and dance now ---- save that for later ---- remember what I said earlier ----- you know about taking up your cross ---- you know submitting --- obeying --- following --- getting behind me Peter ----- well now is the time for that --- submission ---- obedience --- following me --- following God just I have been following God.

That's what our spiritual journey is all about --- following God --- submitting to and before God ---- obeying Him --- knowing when it is time to break out into sing and dance and when it is time to submit humbly.

There will be a great and wonderful party ---- celebration ----- eternity ---- but right now it's less about party --- although from time to time for sure --- but right now it's less about party and more about submission --- obedience --- and following.

“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” ----- those are pretty clear words.

So ----- what about ourselves are we denying?

What part of ourselves are we actively working at killing off --- so that we might be more inclined to follow Him?

And ----- in what ways do we submit to God?

Can we name an activity ---- or approach to living ---- in our lives right now that is a clear indication that we are submitting to God?

What are we doing --- is there evidence in our lives --- right now --- that shows we are putting ourselves second and God first?

Life is often a lot like Lent.

Easter is a lot like eternity ---- but life is a lot like Lent.

If we seriously look out around the world --- the only realm of existence where Satan has any influence left ----- the world is a lot more like Lent than Easter.

Easter means no more Satan --- Easter is post resurrection.

Lent is us now ---- this earth --- the last real where Satan can flex his tiny little muscles from time to time.

How can we continually throw a party everyday when we know there is still work to be done?

As long as there are still souls captive to death --- in the grip of death --- in the grip of Satan --- how can we be throwing parties all the time?

Sure we can still celebrate from time to time --- we need to for sure --- but the end goal can't be party after party after party --- when we know there is still such great suffering in the world.

If we were to break out a birthday cake everyday and have people sing happy birthday to us and blow out the candles and so on --- all the stuff of birthdays --- it would mean very little to do all of this on the day of our actual birthday.

If all we ever do is live in the happy clappy celebration of Easter without also taking the Lenten road of submission --- obedience --- and follow me --- - Easter ceases to mean anything when we actually get there.

“The disciples --- in common with many Christians throughout the church's life --- want to have the glory that they can see --- without the message that they must hear ---- but the two cannot be separated.”

There is no Easter without first Lent --- without first Good Friday.

There is no celebration without first submission.

That is just the reality of life in Christ --- that is just the reality of our spiritual journey.

“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” --- Jesus says.

What cross are we carrying?

What are we willing --- and actively trying to kill off about ourselves?

In what ways are we submitting to Him?

How are we following Him more today than yesterday?

“The disciples --- in common with many Christians throughout the church’s life --- want to have the glory that they can see --- without the message that they must hear ---- but the two cannot be separated.”

Jesus said ----- “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

Amen.