

A Homily in 3 Parts (3.8.2020)

2nd Sunday of Lent

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Mark 10:32-52 is made up of three interrelated yet separable units. For this reason, as well as the length of the whole passage in the reading of it, we will be reflecting on each section separately, throughout the service this morning.

Part 1. Jesus' third prediction of his destiny (v. 32-34)

Then people will mock Him, spit upon Him, whip Him, and kill Him. But on the third day, He will rise again. (Mark 10:34)

In chapter 8, 9, and 10 in the Gospel of Mark, we see a literary pattern emerge, which was very likely intended by the author of this gospel. In each of those chapters there is a "prediction of the Son of Man's destiny by Jesus" followed by a scene of the "disciples' misunderstanding" and ends with "Jesus teaching about discipleship."

We begin with the reflection on Jesus prediction of the Son of Man's destiny. For the opening of verse 32, the author uses the Greek word [hodos] meaning "on the road" or "on the way," which can refer to both a geographical and theological path. Through out the Gospels, this word is used often. So much so that it's no wonder that the followers of Jesus, after his resurrection, called themselves followers of "the Way."

I understand this to mean that a people of faith needs to always be on the move, both geographically and theologically. There are very few times, throughout the Gospels that Jesus and the disciples aren't on the move. And Jesus is continually sending his followers to "go out," "go on," and to "continue on to the next place," both physically, as well as mentally and spiritually.

This is also part of the reason I chose the altar theme of

moving through the wilderness with Jesus. As Christians we are meant to forever be “on the way.” Never settling down, never remaining in one place too long, never getting to comfortable in one place – again, both geographically and theologically. It makes me wonder if church communities should all “reside” in food trucks... to be able to “set-up shop” anywhere; for worship, for community, for outreach...

And sometimes, on this way, Jesus invites us to move into dangerous territory, for the sake of spreading the Gospel. In the gospel of Mark Jerusalem is seen as a source of hostility; therefore it's logical that those following Jesus may be “amazed” and “afraid.” Here are several different translations at the end of verse 32:

“They were amazed, and those who followed were afraid.”

(NRSV)

“As they neared the city, wonder and amazement filled them.

But soon those who were following began to tremble.”

(Voice)

“They were following, puzzled and not just a little afraid.”

(Message)

In the way that the author of the Gospel of Mark tells it, everyone traveling with Jesus “knew,” that to bring their message into the city of Jerusalem was almost certainly a suicide mission. What's more, Jesus confirms their fears as they make their way towards the city.

Of the three prophecies of death and resurrection in chapters 8, 9, and 10, Mark 10:33-34 is the most detailed: it is a perfect summary of Mark's passion narrative, which occurs in chapters 14-16. Mark 10:33-34 draws out the collusion between Jewish and Gentile authorities and catalogues the Son of Man's abuse before his death and resurrection.

For me the most important part of the prophecy, every time it's repeated, no matter how grim the rest of it sounds, is that Jesus is telling his followers "Death will not have the last word."

At the end of verse 34 we have a Greek grammatical conjunction word [de] and it can be translated in several ways: but, on the other hand, and, moreover, on top of this. Depending on the translation of Mark 10:34, you'll see all of those variations. The Voice translation decided to use the translation "but." And I think most of you know that I'm trying to do away with the use of that word.

So here's how verse 34 sounds with the different translation possibilities: *Then people will mock Him, spit upon Him, whip Him, and kill Him. **On the other hand**, on the third day, He will rise again.*

*Then people will mock Him, spit upon Him, whip Him, and kill Him. **And** on the third day, He will rise again.*

*Then people will mock Him, spit upon Him, whip Him, and kill Him. **Moreover** on the third day, He will rise again.*

*Then people will mock Him, spit upon Him, whip Him, and kill Him. **On top of this**, on the third day, He will rise again.*

The one that, on this side of the resurrection, sounds the most like “Good News” to me is the one with the use of the word, “and.” Humanity is obsessed with death and violence, and God will not let death be the last word. In that spirit, let us now share together in a time of confession...

Part 2. Discipleship bogus and bona fide (v. 35-45)

You know that among the nations of the world the great ones lord it over the little people and act like tyrants. But that is not the way it will be among you. Whoever would be great among you must serve and minister. Whoever wants to be

great among you must be slave of all. Even the Son of Man came not to be served but to be a servant—to offer His life as a ransom for others. (Mark 10:42-45)

Professor Clifton Black, of Princeton Theological Seminary, says that “Mark’s implied motto for the twelve disciples is ‘If at first you don’t perceive, fail, fail again.’” Let’s take a quick look back at the “disciple’s misunderstanding” in chapters 8 and 9. In Mark 8:32-33 Peter rebukes Jesus’ teaching about the Son of Man needing to suffer, die, and be brought back to life; in turn, Peter is rebuked by Jesus as “Satan,” for attempting to divert his teacher away from the way that must be walked. In Mark 9:33-34, after Jesus’ teaching about the Son of Man needing to suffer, die, and be brought back to life, the twelve bicker about rank and who is the greatest follower of Jesus.

Then, today, in Mark 10:35-37, James and John’s request

takes the cake for bogus discipleship. First, their request is completely detached from the reality of what Jesus has been preaching and teaching about, never mind that it's inconsistent with the attitude of others who seek Jesus' attention. Second, they flagrantly petition for Jesus' patronage, which Jesus never grants, to anyone. Third, they request to be seated on either side of Jesus "in [his] glory" disregarding everything Jesus has emphasized about the Son of Man's destiny to suffer. Forth, the Zebedee brothers are mirroring the way this world's rulers throw their weight around. Worse still, they appeal for places of supreme honor—"at your right hand."

Jesus replies that they have no idea what they are asking to receive. He asks about their ability "to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with" and they reply with a delusional "We can." To use a

modern metaphor, Jesus is asking "Can you fly faster than a speeding bullet and leap tall buildings in a single bound?"

And the brother's Zebedee reply, "We can."

James and John's wires are crossed in that they are drooling over blessings that they think accompany exaltation with Jesus in glory, where as Jesus is referring to a cup and a baptism with mortal consequences. Both baptism and the Lord's supper are to be understood as participation with Jesus in his transformation through death.

Jesus goes on to clarify that he does not deny his followers will suffer for the sake of the Gospel. What he refuses them are places of honor. These are not his to grant; they are God's to give. To the very end Jesus refuses any authority not been given to him by God, whose will is the final word. Predictably, the other disciples take offense at the Zebedee

brothers' power maneuvering. In that moment, Jesus calls all Twelve to gather around for a lesson about authentic, or bona fide, discipleship. Jesus tell them that this world's construction of authority, which James and John have projected onto the end of time, is altogether false.

Relationship status, as created and instructed by God, turns the conventional expectations upside down. In Mark 9, Jesus compares the "servant" they need to become to like becoming "a little child" who, in Jesus' time was completely without power. In Mark 10, the "servant" status slides even lower into "everyone's slave": an even more offensive status reduction for the time.

Although slavery in Jesus' time carried varied connotations, it was generally considered a miserable form of life. In Mark 10, the status of slavery becomes radically normative for

Jesus' disciples, because Jesus is not a new master; the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.

To use another modern-day metaphor - to be at Jesus' right and left hand, is like asking to be at the right and left hand of Mother Theresa throughout her life. To be a disciple of Jesus is to give up all power and privilege and become a servant of God, doing the work of bringing comfort, compassion, and love to those people that those in "human power and authority" have oppressed and abandoned...

Part 3. Bartimaeus (verses 46-52)

Bartimaeus cast aside his beggar's robe and stepped forward, feeling his way toward Jesus.

Jesus: What do you want from Me?

Bartimaeus: Teacher, I want to see.

Jesus: Your faith has made you whole. Go in peace.

In that moment, Bartimaeus could see again; and from that time on, he followed Jesus. (Mark 10:50-52)

In addition, to the literary pattern that I made reference to about chapters 8, 9, and 10 of Mark's Gospel, it's helpful to note that this entire section, Mark 8:22-10:52, is bookended by stories about Jesus healing the blind. This is specifically crafted by the author.

Throughout the Gospels, blindness is a metaphor for the inability or refusal to acknowledge Jesus for who he truly is; and vision (or the ability to see) is a metaphor for acceptance of Jesus and of his teaching.

One of my favorite lessons that I learned, when I was a child, comes from the original Mary Poppins Disney movie. The night before the "outing with their father," as Mary is tucking the children to bed, she tells them, "Sometimes a person we love, through no fault of their own, can't see past the end of

their nose.” As I've gotten older, whenever a scripture passage about the lack of understanding of Jesus disciple's, or one of the miracles of healing sight comes up, my mind goes right back to that line from Mary Poppins and the fact that she is talking about “seeing” those that society chooses to ignore.

Like what happened with Bartimaeus. Everyone around him, all those who were following Jesus, who had ***physically*** seen Jesus perform other miracles, allowed their own insecurities and blind-sides to cause them to yell at Bartimaeus for speaking up for what he needed.

Mark skillfully redesigns a miracle story to teach a lesson in this episode about discipleship. The stern rebuke of Bartimaeus, from Jesus' followers, is a flashback to the disciples' rebuke of little children; in both moments Jesus

insists on receiving the one who is without power and is petitioning for this attention.

When Bartimaeus “throws off his cloak” as he gets up, it harkens the listener back to chapter 8, to those possessions and encumbrances that Jesus tells his disciples that people need to shed, in order to follow him.

Jesus’ question to Bartimaeus is identical to that which he asked James and John in verse 36. James and John blindly fluffed themselves up for glory, whereas Bartimaeus insightfully tells Jesus, “Teacher, I want to see.” Unlike the twelve disciples, this fellow knows what he is asking; his appeal springs from restorative faith, as Jesus acknowledges with his answer, “Your faith has made you whole. Go in Peace.” Bartimaeus’ request is immediately fulfilled: he regains sight. He moves from the side of the road or

“wayside” onto “the Way,” following Jesus, which is Mark’s literary repetitive metaphor for discipleship.

The sightless see; the sighted are blind. This is another hard lesson that Jesus is asking us to learn. Who can listen to it, without first feeling defensive or resentful? How often have we brushed aside someone, like Bartimaeus, who we've decided can't give us anything, or advance our own lives in anyway? How often has someone pointed out to us that we can't see past the end of our nose?

Bartimaeus, in his life journey, had reached a place where he was ready for complete transformation in body, heart, soul, and mind; whereas the disciples – we're told in this whole section of Mark 10:32-52 - were not. As we acknowledged together at the beginning of the service, it was hard for the disciples to hear that they would have to suffer in order to

follow Jesus. It is hard for US to hear that we will have to suffer in order to follow Jesus; especially when our society tells us that we deserve to live comfortable lives that give us everything we would ever want to buy, own, or possess.

As we continue on our journey through the wilderness of Lent, I invite us to look to the example of Bartimaeus to give us faith and courage to follow Jesus, especially when following The Way seems painful or frightening. Amen.