

September 16, 2018
Columbia Congregational Church
17th Sunday After Pentecost
Mark 8:27-38

Set Your Mind on Jesus
Sermon by the Reverend Betsey Polglase

So much is happening in this scripture reading. It's a lot to break down in one sermon.

Let's remember that the disciples had been following Jesus for some time. This Jesus, he was different, charismatic, even exciting to be around. He offered hope to those who lived under the oppression of the Roman Empire and the Jewish laws. He made it possible for those who had been outcast to be whole again and come back into community, so essential to survival not only in the first century but also throughout the centuries, even 21st century. Building up community, not dividing it, gives the people strength.

From the disciples' perspective, they were coming to believe this Jesus just might be the promised One; the hoped for Messiah, the one who would set their lives right and free them from oppressions of all sorts. Yes, Jesus surely brought hope for many.

Just before our morning's reading, Jesus heals a blind man. It takes two tries. The first try his vision was only partially cleared. It took a second laying on of his hands on the man's eyes to bring clear vision to the one who had been blind. Perhaps this was Mark's way of preparing us for the lack of vision of the disciples, and ourselves. Understanding, this seems to imply, comes in steps.

Jesus and the disciples are in Roman territory on their way to Jerusalem, when Jesus asks them, "Who do people say that I am?" The responses were mixed – John the Baptist, who was beheaded, Elijah, who rose into the heavens but did not appear to actually die, or one of the prophets, those leaders who had some divine connection. But then, Jesus narrows the question down, "Who do *you* say that I am." Peter answers for all the disciples. "You are the Messiah."

This was Peter's moment to show how clever he and the disciples were to have figured out who Jesus was. They didn't get it at first but now it was clear. Jesus was the

Messiah, the Messiah they have been waiting for. Surely Peter expected Jesus to say, “Well done. Come sit beside me.”

But first Jesus tells Peter, and thus the disciples, to tell no one. Then, even worse, Jesus began to talk about how he must suffer, be rejected by the highly respected elders of the faith community – that is the chief priests and the scribes – and then be killed. I question if the disciples even heard him say that he would rise again from the dead after three days. Everything was looking so good just a moment before and now what was Jesus talking about.

Before we judge Peter too harshly, let me ask you, Who would you rather follow: a person who is becoming known all over for his healings and miracles, one who speaks with authority and demonstrates remarkable power, followed by thousands of people; or a person headed for persecution, suffering and death?

In these days of the political campaigns, think of the candidates vying for election, or reelection in November. Who is going to vote for someone who predicts his own demise. I could not help but envision Peter coming up to Jesus and telling him he had really blown his sales pitch; his ratings were going to drop. Scripture tells us Peter took Jesus aside and said, “Jesus, what are you doing? Saying these things is political suicide. But Jesus reprimands Peter. Peter. Peter. Peter.

This made me think of the television series of years ago called *The Brady Bunch*. How many of you remember that show? (show of hands). ? It was popular from 1969-1974, so it dates us. For those of you who don’t remember or are too young to have watched it, the show was about a widowed architect named Mike who married Carol who was a stay at home mom – not sure if widowed or divorced. He brought 3 sons and Alice the live-in housekeeper to the marriage and she brought 3 daughters. As you can imagine that was enough to create some humorous episodes of awkward adjustments, accommodations, gender and sibling rivalries, and resentments inherent in families. 2nd daughter Jan had a lot of problems with her older sister Marcia who was very popular but had a fragile ego. In one episode Jan responds to Marcia’s rant about some argument or perceived dilemma by saying, “Marcia. Marcia. Marcia. It’s all about you, isn’t it?” A line that has gone down in history.

I bring this up because I can imagine Jesus saying, “Peter. Peter. Peter. You think this is all about you and your place in the world.” Having just declared Jesus to be the Messiah, we think Peter finally realizes who Jesus is and has stopped putting his own interests first. But when Jesus then describes what lies ahead for him Peter’s enthusiasm is squashed. He had pictured himself the second in command with the victorious ruler of the land. Persecution, and crucifixion? Such crazy talk by this Messiah Jesus. Peter must have wondered, “what about me?” Jesus’ response? “Peter. Peter. Peter. You stand in my way and your own way. Don’t set your mind on worldly things, but on divine things. “

Finally, Jesus speaks to the crowd about what it means to be his follower. I like how Eugene Peterson puts it in *The Message Bible*:³⁴⁻³⁷ Calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, “Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You’re not in the driver’s seat; *I* am. Don’t run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I’ll show you how. Self-help is no help at all.

Indeed, “the illusion of self-sufficiency” can soon become idolatry. It is “the ‘humble’ who recognize their need for God and the ‘proud’ who think they can take care of themselves.”¹ We become idol worshipers, put ourselves on the throne of our lives, when we think we can go it alone.

If we live each day knowing how much God loves us, we can step aside, unafraid, and let Jesus lead. We risk everything knowing we risk nothing of the greatest importance. When we set our mind on Jesus, we can counter the empires of this day and be receptive in our life journey and our faith journey to trust that God will lead us and gradually shape our identity for the coming realm of God.

As we come to the Annual Meeting, let us set our minds on Jesus and let him lead us in our deliberation as the Body of Christ. As we go out into the worlds in which we live, let us set our minds on Jesus, putting all our trust in him who loves us beyond measure.

Let us Pray:

¹ Alan Brehm, *the Walking Dead*, 2009, found on Textweek September 2012 *Renouncing Sufficiency*.

Wise and wonderful Jesus, you proclaim the way of life and of death. Grant us the wisdom to know that by setting our mind on you, we may know the way of life and glory.
Amen.