

Lent 2—Year B  
Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16  
Psalm 22: 22-30  
Romans 4:13-25  
Mark 8:31-38

We witness this strange encounter today in **Mark's** gospel. We hear that **Jesus began to teach his disciples that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.** We hear that **Jesus said all this quite openly.**

We *then* hear that **Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him** *which then* prompted Jesus to **turn and look at his disciples, and rebuke Peter, saying, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."**

We hear how Jesus then called the crowd with his disciples, and said, **"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."** Followed by one of the *most paradoxical sayings* in all of scripture, **"For those who want to *save their life* will *lose* it, and those who *lose their life* for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will *save* it. For what will it *profit* them to *gain the whole world* and *forfeit their life*? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?"**

And we hear Jesus close his remarks by *bringing shame front and center*, saying, **"Those who are *ashamed of me* and of *my words* in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man *will also be ashamed* when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."**

*What we don't hear today is the set-up to this whole episode.*

In the verses *just before* this passage, Jesus had *just been asking*, **"Who do people say that I am?"** Some of his disciples answered **Elijah**, some answered **John the Baptist**, but Peter answered, **"Oh no, you are the Christ; you are the anointed one; you are the Messiah."** In **Matthew's** account of this exchange, Peter is given high marks by Jesus for this answer, but in **Mark's** telling, Jesus only responds by ordering his disciples not to tell anyone about him.

So, the weirdness between Peter and Jesus has a context. Peter has just identified him as the Christ, the Messiah *which makes Jesus self-identification all the more potent.* *Jesus doesn't claim to be the Christ; he self-identifies as the Son of Man, the Son of Humanity; Jesus claims solidarity with the human condition.*

You can see how Jesus and Peter are on a collision course here. Peter is grooving on the Messiah track *which in ancient Israel* also held an element of restoring Israel politically to its chosen place on top. *To be the Christ came with expectations for all of Israel.* So, it blindsides Peter when Jesus starts talking about having to undergo great suffering, and about how he would be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes—read *rejected by all the power players of Israel.* And in the Greek, this rejection was *not borne of ignorance*, but rather is the kind of rejection that comes when you have examined something, and after having examined it, you determine that it isn't genuine, isn't worthy; this is a *considered rejection* which is *even more painful.* And this rejection would become murderous—Jesus will be killed by the powers-that-be—and *after three days*, he will rise again.

The text then tells us that **Jesus said all this quite openly**. Again, the Greek is even clearer—**Jesus spoke this freely, without reservation, without concealment, without ambiguity or circumlocution; he spoke with free and fearless confidence, cheerful courage, boldness, and assurance**. In other words, *this didn't freak Jesus out at all*; it was all part of his **solidarity with suffering humanity**.

*But it freaked Peter out greatly*, hence Peter's rebuke of Jesus. Peter couldn't square this **trajectory down with the rising star of the Messiah which surely was a trajectory up**. Apparently, the **powers-that-be** couldn't either because, *eventually, they will kill Jesus* for the way he talks and acts. *But for now*, we're **only concerned with Peter's expectations of how Messiahs move in this world, as compared with Jesus' understanding of where the Son of Man plants himself—the whole setting one's mind on human things, instead of divine things**.

No, to *follow Jesus is always going to involve the cross* in some form, shape, or fashion, *always*. It's **going to involve some sort of loss, some sort of losing the life you think you have**. *Following Jesus* is going to be a **rejection of any kind of grasping to save our life**, knowing that **the more we grasp at power, prestige, position, OR safety, security and survival, OR esteem and affection, the more we grasp at these power centers of the False Self—"gaining the whole world" in Jesus' language—the more we think these things will save us, will make us whole, THEN the more we will lose the life that is deeper than all of these things, the more we will lose touch with the essential life, the timeless and eternal life of the True Self that is completely at rest AND completely secure BECAUSE it knows that it is completely connected to the Divine Source AND completely loved**.

*When you lose all the things that the False Self calls "life"*—when you either **surrender those things OR they are ripped away from you—well, that's when you collapse back into the only thing that's left—God—and that's when you discover the only life worth living, that's when you discover the life that Jesus calls "the abundant life."**

Okay, *but then Jesus closes with this admonition that doesn't feel very Jesus-like*: "Those who are **ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed** when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Oh, I don't like Jesus joining in the shame game. I've got too much **Brené Brown** in me not to be disturbed by this. Shame is **dangerous** and so **very destructive**. In **defining shame**, **Brown** says this: "*I define shame as the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging—something we've experienced, done, or failed to do makes us unworthy of connection.*"

*I don't believe shame is helpful or productive. In fact, I think shame is much more likely to be the source of destructive, hurtful behavior than the solution or cure. I think the fear of disconnection can make us dangerous.*"

So, why does Jesus pull the shame card???

Well, first, he's talking about how this **adulterous and sinful generation** is **ashamed of him**. **Adulterous** was the **image used by the prophets** to depict the way the **people had gone astray and worshiped idols** and **veered off the path of what it meant to live in covenant with God, particularly with regards to**

treatment of the most vulnerable and those who suffered the most. And *sinful*, in this context, gets at that sense of being cut-off, separate from others.

Think about all that Jesus has just said about the life we cling to AND the life we need to lose to FIND the life God intends for us. *Now it begins to fall into place. All that grasping and clinging behavior of the False Self, within our own being AND in the body politic, all the idols of security and power and esteem that we worship and all the ways these behaviors cut us off from God AND one another AND from our very own soul—THESE FORCES are repulsed by the Son of Man's solidarity with those who suffer; they recoil at his naked vulnerability; they look at his willingness to align himself with a suffering humanity and they deem him unworthy of connection. They are ashamed of this Son of Man—they are ashamed of the words of inclusion and compassion and love that he speaks, both with his mouth and with his life and being. When you are worshipping at the altar of power and security and esteem, you have no room for connection with human suffering, which means you have no room for Son of Man who will stretch out his arms on the hard wood of the cross to catch all of humanity in his loving embrace.*

Jesus simply replies, “*Of those who have no room for suffering, the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.*” I might wish Jesus had chosen some other turn of phrase than *deploying shame in his response*, but the more I sit with this notion, I think Jesus is simply stating something that is TRUE.

*If you believe that vulnerable, suffering humanity is not worthy of connection, then you are going to have a hard time experiencing connection with a God who is nakedly vulnerable, you are going to have a hard time connecting with a crucified God, even when glory is pouring out of wounds luminous with resurrection life. We think glory is easy, but it's not—glory on the other side of the cross calls for just as much vulnerability as suffering does.*

I think Jesus is just giving his followers a stark warning: “*If you can't connect to me in vulnerability and suffering, then you're not going to be able to connect to me in glory. I'm the Son of Man; I'm not interested in being a Messiah of glory apart from the fullness of the human condition that I took on when I took on flesh. It all hangs together for me; and if you don't think humanity—yours or somebody else's—is worthy of connection with me, then you have missed what this whole enterprise is about, and no amount of glory will help you see who I am if you can't also see me on the cross.*”

*Jesus isn't trying to cast us out in shame; he's showing us the true danger whenever we deem anything as unworthy of connection.*

Bottom line, your suffering, my suffering, the world's suffering—THIS is where Jesus lives. And the powers-that-be, and even Jesus' closest followers, have such a hard time wrapping their head and hearts around that fundamental truth. *But to those who suffer, this is gospel; this is good news.*

And it doesn't just end there.

Jesus doesn't just suffer all that humanity suffers in this life, *but he drinks the dregs of that suffering until he dies*, and his death on the cross was the most shameful and humiliating way to die; Jesus fills THAT space of shame and death with Divine Presence that doesn't turn away, *not even then*. And he'll sit vigil in the tomb, holding space *even there*. And in three days, he will rise, and light and life will pour out of those wounds. He is the Crucified and Risen Lord; *not Crucified OR Risen, but both.*

*And so too it will be for us.*

The Son of Man aligns himself with our suffering, *but he will also guide us to life on the other side. Don't miss that journey* because you're ashamed of your suffering and the wrenching vulnerability that always comes with it. *Don't turn to other idols* to assuage your discomfort with vulnerability and your fear of powerlessness. *Don't cut yourself off* because you think such suffering unworthy of connection. You are infinitely precious in God's sight, absolutely worthy of connection—the Son of Man will die stretching his arms out to catch you up in that love. Collapse into his embrace and discover the life that isn't afraid to die because it *knows* it's worthy and trusts it will rise. Amen.

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February 28, 2021