

“IF ANY WANT TO BECOME MY FOLLOWERS.....”

**A SERMON BASED ON THE GOSPEL OF MARK
(8:31-38) AND PRESENTED FOR ORLEAN UMC ON
FEBRUARY 28, 2021----THE SECOND SUNDAY IN
LENT**

**IT’S A BIT IRREVERENT AND CERTAINLY NOT
SCRIPTURAL BUT THIS MORNING I HAVE THIS
PECULAR MENTAL PICTURE OF THE
DISCIPLES..... MY MIND WANDERS AND IT IS
NOW SEVERAL YEARS AFTER JESUS’ DEATH
AND RESURRECTION..... THE DISCIPLES ARE
TOGETHER.....**

THEY ARE TALKING ABOUT THE GOOD OLD DAYS, LAUGHING, TEASING, AND REMINISCING THE WAY FRIENDS WHO HAVE SHARED A LIFE CHANGING EXPERIENCE OFTEN DO..... THEN ONE OF THEM LOOKS AT PETER AND SAYS, “HEY SATAN, TELL US ABOUT THE DAY YOU REBUKED JESUS!” ANOTHER JOINS IN, “YEAH, HOW’D THAT WORK OUT FOR YOU?” AND STILL ANOTHER, “WHAT WERE YOU THINKING ABOUT, PETER?” -----

PETER BEGINS TO SPEAK, “YOU KNOW I JUST DIDN’T LIKE THE WHOLE SUFFERING AND DYING THING. I DIDN’T GET IT. THAT’S NOT WHAT I SIGNED UP FOR.

**THAT'S NOT WHO I THOUGHT THE MESSIAH
WOULD BE." THE OTHERS BECOME QUIET. THEY
RECALL THAT DAY LIKE IT WAS YESTERDAY.
THEY BEGIN TO REALIZE THAT PETER DIDN'T
SAY ANYTHING THEY WEREN'T THINKING.**

**MAYBE PETER DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING WE
HAVEN'T THOUGHT OR EVEN WANTED TO SAY.
JESUS HAS A VERY DIFFERENT UNDERSTANDING
OF DISCIPLESHIP THAN WHAT MOST OF US
PROBABLY WANT..... WHEN ANOTHER'S REALITY
AND VISION BEGIN TO CONFLICT WITH AND
OVERTAKE OUR OWN WE REBUKE.**

**WE TAKE THEM ASIDE TO ENLIGHTEN THEM,
HELP THEM UNDERSTAND, SHOW THEM THE
ERROR OF THEIR WAYS.....AND AFTER ALL----
THAT IS ALL PETER DID.**

**IF WE ARE REALLY HONEST HAVEN'T WE, AT
SOME POINT, DISAGREED WITH JESUS, ASKING
WHY HE DOESN'T DO WHAT WE WANT? WHY
WON'T HE SEE THE WORLD OUR WAY? *IT ALL
SEEMS SO CLEAR TO US:***

- . IF HE CAN CAST OUT THE DEMONS AND
SILENCE THE CRAZY GUY IN THE SYNAGOGUE
SURELY HE COULD SILENCE THE VOICES THAT
DRIVE US CRAZY.**

- . IF HE CAN HEAL PETER'S MOTHER IN LAW WHY NOT THOSE WE LOVE?**
- . IF HE CAN CLEANSE THE LEPER WHY DOES OUR LIFE SOMETIMES LEAVE US FEELING UNCLEAN AND ISOLATED?**
- . IF HE CAN MAKE THE PARALYTIC WALK WHY ARE SO MANY CRIPPLED BY FEAR, DEMENTIA, OR ADDICTION?**
- . IF HE CAN CALM THE SEA SURELY HE COULD CALM THE STORMS OF OUR WORLD. YET THEY RAGE ON; VIOLENCE, WAR, POVERTY AND DIVISION.**

. IF HE CAN KEEP JAIRUS' DAUGHTER FROM DYING WHY NOT OUR CHILDREN, OUR FRIENDS, OUR LOVED ONES? WHY HAVE OVER 500 THOUSAND OF OUR COUNTRYMEN AND WOMEN DIED FROM THE RAVAGES OF COVID 19

. IF HE CAN FEED 5000 WITH A FEW FISH AND PIECES OF BREAD WHY DOES MUCH OF THE WORLD GO TO BED HUNGRY?

I HAVE WONDERED ABOUT THESE THINGS. I

HAVE BEEN ASKED THESE KIND OF QUESTIONS. I

KNOW SOME WHO HAVE LOST FAITH AND LEFT

THE CHURCH OVER THESE THINGS. THESE ARE

OUR REBUKES OF JESUS. HE IS NOT BEING OR

ACTING LIKE WE WANT.

**SOMETIMES HIS WORDS CHALLENGE AND
SHOCK US..... MAYBE WE'RE NOT SO DIFFERENT
FROM PETER.**

**JUST A FEW VERSES BEFORE TODAY'S GOSPEL
LESSON JESUS ASKS, "WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I
AM?" PETER NAMES HIM AS "THE CHRIST," THE
MESSIAH, THE ANOINTED ONE OF GOD.**

***JESUS IS THE ONE OF WHOM THE PROPHETS
SPOKE, THE ONE FOR WHO ISRAEL HAS WAITED,
THE ONE WHO WAS SUPPOSED TO RESTORE
GOD'S PEOPLE.***

PETER IS RIGHT AND YET HE ALSO DOES NOT UNDERSTAND.

PETER HAS AN IMAGE OF WHAT THE MESSIAH IS SUPPOSED TO DO AND WHO THE MESSIAH IS SUPPOSED TO BE. WE ALL HAVE OUR OWN IMAGES AND WISHES ABOUT WHO JESUS IS AND WHAT HE SHOULD DO. ALL IS WELL WHEN JESUS IS CASTING OUT DEMONS, HEALING THE SICK, PREVENTING DEATH, AND FEEDING THE MULTITUDES. WE LIKE THAT JESUS. WE WANT TO FOLLOW THAT JESUS. HE IS OUR LORD AND SAVIOR.

JESUS WILL NOT, HOWEVER, CONFORM TO OUR
IMAGES OF WHO WE THINK HE IS OR WHO WE
WANT HIM TO BE. INSTEAD, HE ASKS US TO
CONFORM TO WHO HE KNOWS HIMSELF TO BE:
THE ONE WHO “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.”

HE SETS A CHOICE BEFORE US. IT IS A CHOICE
WE EACH HAVE TO MAKE. AGAIN AND AGAIN
THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF LIFE SET THAT CHOICE
BEFORE US.

WE EITHER CHOOSE OURSELVES AND DENY
JESUS OR WE DENY OURSELVES AND CHOOSE
JESUS. “IF ANY WANT TO BECOME MY
FOLLOWERS,” HE SAYS, “LET THEM DENY
THEMSELVES AND TAKE UP THEIR CROSS AND
FOLLOW ME.” SELF DENIAL IS THE BEGINNING
OF DISCIPLESHIP.

I SUSPECT THAT IS NOT WHAT PETER HAD IN
MIND WHEN JESUS SAID, “FOLLOW ME AND I
WILL MAKE YOU FISH FOR PEOPLE.”

I WONDER IF THAT IS WHAT WE HAD IN MIND
WHEN --- IN OUR TIME AND DAYS OF PANDEMIC --
-- WE COME TO CHURCH WHEN IN-PERSON
WORSHIP IS POSSIBLE OR PERHAPS READ
AND/OR WORSHIP ONLINE OR ON OUR OWN.....
OR WHAT WE THINK ABOUT WHEN OUR BABY OR
OUR GRANDCHILD IS BAPTIZED, OR HOW OFTEN
WE UNDERSTAND AND PRACTICE OUR FAITH AS
DAILY SELF DENIAL.

JESUS' WORDS ARE HARD AND HIS WAY

EXTREME.

SURELY GOD DID NOT COVENANT WITH HIS PEOPLE AND BRING THEM OUT OF EGYPT INTO THE PROMISED LAND ONLY TO SAY, “NOW LET IT ALL GO.” -----THE MESSIAH IS SUPPOSED TO OFFER SECURITY, PROTECTION, AND PUT ISRAEL BACK ON TOP..... FAITH IN JESUS, PETER IS LEARNING, IS NOT ABOUT THE ELIMINATION OF RISKS, THE PRESERVATION OF LIFE, AND THE ABILITY TO CONTROL..... *INSTEAD, JESUS ASKS US TO RISK IT ALL, ABANDON OUR LIVES, AND RELINQUISH CONTROL TO GOD. THAT IS WHAT JESUS IS DOING AND HE EXPECTS NOTHING LESS OF THOSE WHO WOULD FOLLOW HIM.*

THE WAY OF CHRIST, SELF-DENIAL, REMINDS US
THAT OUR LIFE IS NOT OUR OWN. IT BELONGS
TO GOD. IT REMINDS US THAT WE ARE NOT IN
CONTROL, GOD IS. OUR LIFE IS NOT ABOUT US.
IT IS ABOUT GOD THERE IS GREAT FREEDOM IN
KNOWING THESE THINGS. WE ARE FREE TO BE
FULLY ALIVE.

THROUGH SELF DENIAL OUR FALLING DOWN
BECOMES RISING UP, LOSING IS SAVING, AND
DEATH IS RESURRECTION.

AS LONG AS WE BELIEVE OUR LIFE IS ABOUT US
WE WILL CONTINUE TO EXERCISE POWER OVER
OTHERS, TRY TO SAVE OURSELVES, CONTROL
OUR CIRCUMSTANCES, AND MAYBE EVEN
REBUKE JESUS..... JESUS RARELY EXERCISED
POWER OVER OTHERS OR TRIED TO CONTROL
CIRCUMSTANCES..... HE SIMPLY MADE
DIFFERENT CHOICES..... SELF DENIAL IS NOT
ABOUT BEING OUT OF CONTROL OR
POWERLESS. IT IS ABOUT THE CHOICES WE
MAKE.

JESUS CHOSE TO GIVE IN A WORLD THAT
TAKES, TO LOVE IN A WORLD THAT HATES, TO
HEAL IN A WORLD THAT INJURES, TO GIVE LIFE
IN A WORLD THAT KILLS. HE OFFERED MERCY
WHEN OTHERS SOUGHT VENGEANCE,
FORGIVENESS WHEN OTHERS CONDEMNED, AND
COMPASSION WHEN OTHERS WERE
INDIFFERENT. HE TRUSTED GOD'S ABUNDANCE
WHEN OTHERS SAID THERE WAS NOT ENOUGH.
WITH EACH CHOICE HE DENIED HIMSELF AND
SHOWED GOD WAS PRESENT.

AT SOME POINT THOSE KIND OF CHOICES WILL
CATCH THE ATTENTION OF AND OFFEND THOSE
WHO LIVE AND PROFIT BY POWER, CONTROL,
AND LOOKING OUT FOR NUMBER ONE. THEY
WILL NOT DENY THEMSELVES. THEY WILL
RESPOND. JESUS SAID THEY WOULD. HE KNEW
THAT HE WOULD BE REJECTED BY THE ELDERS,
CHIEF PRIESTS, AND SCRIBES. IT HAPPENS IN
EVERY AGE FOR THOSE WHO CHOOSE THE PATH
OF SELF DENIAL. WHEN IT HAPPENED FOR
JESUS HE MADE ONE LAST CHOICE. HE CHOSE
RESURRECTION OVER SURVIVAL.

“IF ANY WANT TO BECOME MY FOLLOWERS....”

**PRAISE GOD AND MAY IT BE SO FOR YOU AND
FOR ME.....AMEN.....**