

Mark 8 27-38

Where are we today? One of my favorite places - Caesarea Philippi! Hell...When preparing folks for Baptism the first question I always ask is are you here for your get out of hell free card for your little one?

Think about it...we are proclaiming that the all loving creator of the universe would condemn an innocent baby to eternal torment if they don't join my club! What! A parent would never do that to their child so why would we expect God to be like that...and if that is God...an eternal narcissist that needs us to tell Him how great He is all the time...well then count me out...

By the way Hell... was created in the middle ages not in the Bible...The Greek word here is Hades...Caesarea Phillip was where the gates of Hades are located atop a temple to Pan...a Greek fertility god...a Satyr horns and hooves. I've been there many times...

This is Isreal's version of Las Vegas...and it's right in the midst of this sinful and adulterous world...the kingdom of man...that Jesus' final test for his disciples was before heading off to Jerusalem and his death!

So what does it mean to be baptized as a disciple of Jesus here in the kingdom of America? You know after Jesus was baptized He spent 40 days in the desert denying himself and asking himself - what does it even mean to be Jesus...what am I gonna choose to do with my life. Will I follow my will or God's will? Ahh that's the question we are asking here this morning?

Do I follow my will for my life or God's will for all humanity...And the answer to that question is just as unacceptable today as it was back then!

See during the Roman occupation of Israel, the oppressed Jews were looking for a savior, a powerful king to come in and set things right...setting themselves up as the new power of course!

They were looking for a deliverer like Moses or a new King David...why would they ever follow a suffering and dying Messiah!

God wouldn't lose to the world! They wouldn't follow a loser...they were looking for a hero...Jesus' words would be nonsense to the disciples! It's nonsense to us now? The person we claim to follow loses at least in the way the world defines winning and losing...He dies!

Suffering, rejection and death are not part of Peter's agenda here...he didn't sign up for that! Does anyone of us willingly move towards rejection, suffering and death? Is that what our goals in life are? In fact we go to great lengths to avoid all these things don't we?

... as if they weren't part of life's equation.

The disciples wanted to Make Israel Great again...going back to the good ole days when they had the Prestige and the Power...they would take down the Empire and of course replace it with a new and improved Empire...theirs!

...you may not realize this but it only took one generation...one generation... for David's dream of a united and powerful Israel to lose its way and ultimately become corrupted under the wise King Solomon...Power will always corrupts us...no exceptions!

...and now more than 2000 years later has anything changed here in the kingdom of man...the names may change but the human heart doesn't.

So What do we expect from God today? What do we pray for...God's will be done or your will be done? Is our focus on God and others or really just me and myself in disguise? What do you truly desire? What does our nation truly desire? I often like to imagine what it is that God desires for God's creation?

We can get into all sorts of trouble when we start to confuse these things can't we...are we created in God's image... or are we really just creating God in our image!

Hence our versions of Heaven and Hell...and you don't have to die to experience either side of that equation.

That's the crux of it all...that's the question for us all...are we living for the kingdom of man or for the kingdom of God.

It's a quandary between what I like to call the self vs the ego. Our true self, that which is eternal vs our ego that which is circumstantial and created by the world...by us and for us.

The self is who we are in creation... and the ego is how we impose our will upon creation. Self contains our true potential and purpose, whereas the Ego is what we think and believe our potential and purpose to be here and now in this temporary lifetime.

Our ego is an idea that we cling to that identifies our self... to our self. And this is not a bad thing...it's very useful in allowing us to experience all this world has to offer but sometimes it's like not seeing the forest for the trees... see we become our own point of reference.

Egocentricity is when we believe that the universe revolves us...around OUR reference point and that the truth is born from our point of view...

This turning inward is what can easily disconnect us from God and each other...and we can always tell when our ego is in control by our beliefs. Dr Wayne Dyer identified six ego beliefs that we use during our lifetimes to define who we think that we are:

I am what I do (my job)

I am what I have (my stuff)

I am separate from God

I am what others think of me

I am separate from everyone else

I am separate from what's missing in my life

See these assumptions can severely limit our experience in how we live our lives. So how then do we begin to shift our awareness from our ego to our eternal self?

Jesus says it like this “you must lose your life to save it. What good is gaining the whole world but losing your life in the process!”

This has to do with the distinction between identifying with your true self (that part of you that is connected to God and creation) rather than identifying with your smaller and limited ego connected to your localized life experiences.

The ego then is what can separate us from God and one other. Because our bodies are finite and fragile, and because our “life” SEEMS temporary we become “self” absorbed. We focus more on the material world and the outer container rather than the eternal spirit and energy that is contained within us.

Focusing only on the container gives rise to pride, envy, insecurity, self-loathing, narcissism, vanity etc...

And note that organizations, cultures, and nations can also be “ego” driven. “Group think”, a psychological term, where beliefs are based on inclusion and exclusion...us vs them. Many different countries, especially ours, can become self-absorbed, egocentric and materialistic.

Living only for our ego has been the problem ever since creation and plays itself out way back in the garden story in Genesis. The tyranny of our ego is such that if it’s all about us then we will never - ever take up a cross... especially for someone else or the greater good.

Remember, in Jesus’ time the cross was not a cool piece of jewelry or an ideal... it only meant one thing: humiliation, pain and death at the hands of those in power...and the cross was the ultimate expression of don’t mess with the real power over life and death around here! Rome... Any Empire...America...you fill in the blank!?

With ego in control, we will forever seek shortcuts to the Kingdom of God. We will try to substitute anything else to avoid a cross.

In Peter's mind they signed up for a new King and throne...we still talk like this... ruling over the other nations with righteousness, power and might! Isn't that what our own "Christian" Nation sees itself

They signed up for a crown... not a cross! They were solely focused on themselves and their own group's movement... not on the health and wholeness of all of God's creation.

Would we, like Peter, also rebuke Jesus if we were truly asked to take up a cross and follow Him?

Yet that's what we all signed up for in Baptism...that's what these parents are signing their child up for this morning...uh oh...be careful what you wish for...everyone wants the prize but not many wanna walk the talk.

Satan the great accuser, the deceiver, our ego - has always seduced us with a mirror into our earthly wants and desires for our own egocentric desires...regardless of the cost to others...or our world.

We look for fame, recognition, glory, power and status...the world (social media) telling us how great we are...and how fickle the world can be? In - one day...and out - the next!

Now to be honest, I don't know anyone, including myself, that willingly embraces taking up a cross...taking up the pain and suffering of the world. No...We prefer power and kingship...even Jesus when facing his own death asked God for a cross-less death...Father if it is possible take this cup from me!

Unfortunately, it's not how it works. We all have crosses to bear, we all have pain and suffering and ultimately, we will all face death won't we.

Pain, suffering and death are all part of the equation aren't they... inescapable...The thing about this world is that no one gets outta here alive!

The real question is, do we enter into life willingly in such a way as to be transformed by it? To lose our life...only to find it!

To die...only to find something greater...life everlasting. Giving up the finite... to realize the infinite that awaits us.

Peter's rebuke is that of all of us...the use of power and might to make things right...unfortunately what is right for some... may be very wrong for others.

The way to glory for some... leads to suffering for others. The way of earthly power always leads us into a self-centered and myopic perspective of God's creation. Jesus continually points us to a much greater reality.

The son of man **MUST** suffer, **MUST** be rejected by the ways of power in order to Die and rise again...And Peter, like all of us, would have the Messiah take a more heroic traditional roll. We all want God's power to forcibly take on those that oppose our will and then we win! But having a winner always means having many more lose...We think as man...not as God!

Take up your cross and follow me...denying your wants and removing your ego from the center of creation...relinquishing earthly power and status... in favor of God's will and serving the greater whole.

So what does it really mean to follow Jesus? What are we promising for this little one this morning...be careful what you wish for...for you may lose the whole world in order to gain your eternal self. Amen!

your faithful servant,

carmen