

For the Sake of the Gospel

Depths of Love, part 2. umcdiscipleship.org

Mark 8:27-38

Good morning and welcome to Grace UMC. Hasn't it been a beautiful week full of sunshine and blue skies? To me weather like this in February feels like the perfect reminder that spring is not too far off, making the remaining weeks of winter more bearable.

For those of you in the pews and online who are wondering where Pastor Eric is, wonder no more. Pastor Eric is spending his weekend at Lake Louise in Boyne Falls at a planning retreat. It's an intense time of prayer, worship, communion, and preparation for a week of camping with high schoolers this summer. Because he has yet to figure out how to be in two places at once, Pastor Eric asked me to fill in for him today.

Please join me in prayer as we prepare to receive God's word:

Dear Lord, open our ears, eyes, and hearts to be ready to receive all you are sharing with us today. Be in our midst as we wonder about who you are to us and about what you would have us do. Help all of us to be your mouthpiece and an example to those around us. Amen.

Last Sunday we talked about Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, his preparation in solitude for his arduous journey of sharing the good news with the people around him. Today we are jumping right into the middle of his ministry. Pastor Eric left me with quite the scripture for this Sunday. In Mark 8:31 we learn that Jesus is sharing his purpose with those around him. Not just his closest friends, the disciples, but with all of his followers. He introduces the fact that he will have to go through great suffering, humiliation, and even death in order for him to fulfill his purpose. He tells

them that he will rise from the dead three days later. (A ray of sunshine in the middle of February, anyone?)

Now those must have been exciting times. Jesus was finally getting into the meat of things. No parable to neatly package that message into an easier to swallow nugget, he just straight out told all who would listen what was about to happen to him.

In the very next verse we learn that Peter, Jesus’ star student, did not agree with Jesus sharing all of that information with the masses around them. Sure, Jesus had just asked the disciples who they thought he was, and Peter had readily and correctly answered that Jesus was the promised Messiah, but now Jesus was stepping over the line. So Peter, being Peter, did what he thought was the best course of action and pulled Jesus aside. Mark doesn’t tell us what exactly Peter said, but he does tell us that Peter rebuked Jesus. Merriam-Webster tells us that rebuking is defined as “criticizing sharply or serving as an expression of strong disapproval.” Yikes! That is a strong reaction. Rebuking Jesus. I’m not sure I would have mustered up the courage to do that.

As I was reading the scripture while preparing this message, I was wondering why I remembered there actually being a record of the words Peter used to rebuke Jesus. So I cross-referenced the passage and found this account in Matthew 16:22 (NIV): *Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!”*

Reading Matthew’s version of the scripture with the added information does make me feel a bit softer towards Peter. Rebuking Jesus is bold, yes, but you can feel Peter’s concern for his Master through his words. “You just revealed to us that you are the Messiah, and now you are telling us that you will be hurt, ridiculed, and killed? Surely you can’t be

serious! There is no way that you will die at the hands of people.” Peter is upset and outraged at such a claim. He can’t fathom that Jesus’ ministry would end so terribly.

Unfortunately Peter’s mood was about to deteriorate even more. In Mark 8:33 (NIV) we read the following: *But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."*

Now Peter is not just upset at Jesus’ claims, but he is also humiliated and hurt by the fact that Jesus did not appreciate being rebuked. In fact, Jesus calls Peter “Satan” and tells him to get out of his sight. You see, Peter only fixated on Jesus’ prediction of his own death; he only heard that Jesus’ body would be no more. He neglected to pay attention to the part of Jesus’ proclamation where the Master predicted that he would rise from the dead three days after his greatest trial. The resurrection did not register with Peter. He was so focused on human suffering and pain, that he neglected to see the divine miracle Jesus promised.

Before we beat Peter up any more, I think we need to take a step back and look at this scripture passage with different eyes. As we are reading the book of Mark, we already know the ending. We did what I absolutely loathe when reading a new book. Pastor Eric will sometimes read the last chapter of a book before he starts at the beginning, which is something I could never get myself to do. But in this case, we all know what happened in the end. It is the reason we call ourselves Christians. Jesus died on the cross after suffering terribly, atoning for all of our sins, bearing the pain and agony that should have rightfully been ours to bear, but he returned to life after three days.

Peter on the other hand did not know what the ultimate outcome would be. He lived the story. Like someone reading a book for the first time, he was fully immersed and invested. He felt all the feelings, he took in events as they happened. If your best friend told you that they would be beaten, ridiculed, and killed at the hands of those in charge of our beautiful town, would you believe them? I would guess that most of us would not. We would probably be skeptical and pull them aside to talk to them privately. And that is exactly what Peter did.

While Jesus tells Peter in no uncertain terms how he feels about being pulled away from the crowd and rebuked, he also realizes that Peter is most likely not the only one who missed part of his intended message. In verse 34 we read that Jesus called the crowd and his disciples back together to elaborate on what he'd just told them.

When everyone gathered back around, Jesus challenged each and every one of them. He explained that not only would he lose his life, but that those who call themselves his true followers should join him in his suffering, his brokenness. They should pick up their own cross. In order to preserve their lives, they should lose it for the sake of the gospel. Gaining earthly riches might make for an easier earthly life, but it will not result in their eternal life.

Verse 38 really makes me feel the whole weight of Jesus' message: *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."*

That. Hits. Right. In. The. Heart.

If we are ashamed of Jesus and his words in this life, Jesus will be ashamed of us when we enter the glory of God. Wow. Deep breath.

That brings me to the question of the day. What are we willing to lose for the sake of the gospel?

Do we have to put ourselves into life-or-death situations in the name of Jesus? I 100% believe the answer to that is no. There are people who are willing to go that far. There are missionaries, there are people who live in war-torn countries, and there are those who live in countries where merely being a Christian can be deadly. However, I don't believe that most of us are called to go that far.

Have you ever lost yourself in a task so thoroughly that you forgot everything around you? You were so absorbed that you forgot the time, you forgot to eat, or you forgot everything else that needed to be done? Be honest now. We have all been in a situation like that, maybe reading a book, doing a craft, or binge-watching a favorite tv-show.

We obviously can't live every waking moment like that, but what would it look like if we lost ourselves in the gospel like that? What if the good news, the story of Jesus' birth, ministry, death, and resurrection were so ingrained into our awareness, that we lived and breathed them? What could we accomplish in the name of the gospel?

What if we decided to love so fully that love radiated out of our pores, and the people around us couldn't help but feel loved? What if our whole church decided to do that?

Can you imagine the transformation that would take place? How would our whole community benefit from love like that?

I'm not sure that we can accurately answer those questions without actually trying. I invite you to join me this week in being a little more loving towards our neighbors. Let us get lost in being more like Jesus and

sharing the gospel with those around us. When we get lost in the right direction, we are on the path to the kingdom of God.

Let's pray: O God of great compassion, thank you for your presence with us, especially during seasons of suffering. Forgive us for the times we have turned aside from those who suffer. May we be conduits of your love and mercy to those in physical, emotional, or spiritual pain. Help us discern what we need to put aside so that we can be more faithful followers of Jesus. Amen.

INTERCESSORY PRAYER

Prayer requests

Lord Jesus, we come to you today and thank you for the privilege of praying for others. We've been the recipients of others' prayers so often, we understand how powerful intercessory prayer can be. We ask you first to cleanse our hearts and show us if there is any unconfessed sin in our own lives so that our prayers for others will not be hindered. I thank you that through your name, we can come boldly before you and pray with confidence, according to your will and know that you hear us.

We lift up those in our neighborhoods, in our towns, and in this church. Begin with those who follow you, and help them influence others for good. Let them be salt and light, pointing others to you. Deepen their love for you

and for the people around them. Guard them from hypocrisy or from giving in to temptations that could harm the cause of Christ. Raise up leaders who will serve you faithfully at all costs. Turn the hearts of fathers toward their children, and families toward you. Help them to exemplify your values, and make them bold in their faith. Strengthen our own families, and those closest to us, Lord. May our love for you help us to love and forgive others and make a difference in our world.

We pray for teachers, for students, and for all those in authority and leadership, both locally and throughout the world. Give them your mind, and surround them with godly counselors who will exercise integrity and work for justice, morality, and freedom. Help them to esteem you, not dismiss you.

We pray for the lost, the hurting, the lonely, the sick, the bereaved, and those who are imprisoned—behind both visible and invisible walls. Send your comfort, your peace, and your calming presence to those who are without hope. Protect the defenseless, and hold them close to your heart. We pray for laborers to tell the good news of Jesus to people around our world. Jesus, our heart cries out for persecuted believers, too. Make them brave, and give them your powerful protection. We pray you will bring swift justice to those who want to destroy the innocent and those who carry your name. Bind the power of Satan, and strengthen believers everywhere.

So many needs, Jesus, but you are adequate for every need. Your name is powerful, and your power is great. So it's in your name that we pray—and believe. (Rebecca Barlow Jordan- <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/prayer/a-prayer-of-intercession.html>)

Let us join in the words Jesus taught his disciples.

Amen

BENEDICTION

Beloved, go from this place in the love and power of the Triune God—
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—to meet your neighbors and yourself with an
open heart as we take up our cross and follow Jesus for the sake of the
gospel. Amen.