

Mind Set on Divine Things

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Scripture Reading: Mark 8:31-38

³¹ Then he began to teach them 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. ³² He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ 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.”

³⁴ He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ 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. ³⁶ For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷ Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸ 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.”

When you care about someone, when you love someone, when you can empathize with someone who is hurting or will go through some sort of pain, then you will respond in various ways, depending on the circumstances and relationship. When those you care about choose to go on a path that will entail a certain amount of suffering or pain, it's normal to want to direct them away from or even to stop them stepping into such experiences.

I have experienced both. There have been times in my life where I tried to persuade others from choosing to go down paths that would inevitably lead to troubles, sufferings and pains, not because they were bad decisions, but rather because I thought it wasn't worth it. And there have been times when people tried to dissuade me from going tough route because they thought it wasn't necessary or because they didn't want to see me go through the trials that were surely in store for me.

What's often times even more difficult and even heart-wrenching is when those you invested in, poured yourself into, journeyed with through thick and thin seemingly toss it aside without considering your thoughts and feelings.

This happens in life. Some would say it's a part of life. It happens between family, friends, couples, co-workers, and groups, teams, institutions, etc. And though we know it was what had to happen when it came to Jesus, it nonetheless was hard to accept and unacceptable to some like the disciple Peter.

We not only revisit what happened on that day, we also take time to see what God is saying to us this day. Let us dive deeper into the life of Jesus as we journey with him again during this season of Lent so that we can serve him faithfully, bear fruit more joyfully, and bear witness of his salvation to everyone more passionately and lovingly.

Just a moment before Peter told Jesus he couldn't allow himself to suffer, be rejected and killed, Jesus was actually affirming Peter for saying that Jesus was the Messiah, with a capital 'm'. Others said Jesus was a prophet or even Elijah was the miraculously ascended into heaven without having experienced death, as recorded in 2 Kings 2:9-12. Elijah was prophesied to come before the Messiah in Malachi 5:5-6 which reads, "Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes."

Yet, Peter made the pronouncement that Jesus was the Messiah, the promised savior prophesied about. Messiah means "anointed one." When we call Jesus the Christ or call him by name and title Jesus Christ, we are using the word derived from "chrīstós," which in Greek also means "anointed one."

If you read back to the previous verses, just before today's Scripture reading, you'll see that Peter made an incredibly important pronouncement to which Jesus showed how truly significant it was by what he said in Matthew 16:17-30. This is how Jesus responded:

¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." ²⁰ Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

So after Jesus gives him an amazing heavenly pat on the back and incredible promotion which included the building of Christ's Church and keys of the kingdom of heaven, in the very next moment Jesus is rebuking Peter, saying "Get behind me, Satan!" (Mark 8:33)

Wow. What it must have been like for Peter to be filled and revealed to who Jesus was by the Holy Spirit for one moment of being lifted so high, and then quickly humbled so low with having been following what Satan desired, which was Jesus to be stopped from fulfilling his main mission and purpose on earth.

This is so critical to what Jesus teaches his disciples next. And it is critical for us today to also learn as followers of Jesus, the Messiah. Jesus reveals in rebuking Peter so harshly that Peter was focusing his mind on human things rather than on divine things.

Now, consider Peter and the other disciples who left everything to follow Jesus. They not only trusted Jesus as their teacher and leader, but also loved him as their beloved friend who was more than they could imagine or fully understand as they watched him heal the sick, lame maimed, cast demons out of the suffering possessed, restored sight to the blind and so much more! He fed thousands with a few loaves of bread and fish on several occasions.

So, it's understandable why Peter and the other disciples were greatly troubled when their Messiah, Lord and Savior had not planned to be their earthly king, to freed them from the rule

and occupation of the Romans, and to fulfill all the prophecies in the ways they interpreted and understood them. How could they see what no one saw coming? If we were among the disciples when Jesus said he was going to suffer, be rejected by those who had the power to have him killed, be killed, and somehow resurrected after 3 days, we would surely find that hard to believe but also insist that Jesus was going down the wrong path, protesting out of love for him as well as anger, an anger that felt in some ways tricked or even betrayed. No doubt the disciple Judas felt that way, and instead of speaking out like Peter, he dealt with his feelings in responding in a way prophesied also.

Jesus went another step in explaining what it was to have their minds set on divine things rather than human things. He told them how they were to see how they lived their lives on earth would either be that of losing or saving their lives, spiritually speaking.

Though we may know and understand all of this, we are in need of being told again and again what Jesus said and taught. Just as Jesus told the disciples were told over and over again, and at times with great frustration that they just didn't get it, as well as great joy at times when they did seem to get some things, so do we need to be reminded over and over again until it not only sinks in but it becomes ingrained in our minds, hearts and souls so that we live more fully, more committed, more focused, and more freely as disciples of Christ. It's part of our human nature unfortunately, to forget even after experiencing life-changing moments that for a time seemed to totally transform us.

I'm reminded of several friends who had been in terrible car accidents and miraculously walked away with no injuries. One friend showed me and the church a picture of his car, and there seemed to be no way he could have survived, let alone walk away with no injuries. And with no judgment on my part or anyone's part, though he changed various ways of his life, he returned to most of his normal ways and habits in time. However, one thing that remained changed was his faith. He always carried that picture in his wallet to remind him of that very day when he was spared and saved.

Another story was when a friend of mine was hit head-on by a semi-truck, and the driver of the truck got out of his car traumatized and buckled over in grief for surely believing he had just killed whoever was in that small car. My friend climbed out of the window to the then even more terrified truck driver who almost fainted due to thinking my friend was a ghost. The shape of the space left in the car was that of his own body, so snug that he could barely wiggle out. He told this story to me and the entire church several times over until we were silent in awe and with praise in our hearts to God. What I would never forget him telling me was that he knew there were God's angels around him, protecting him for some reason. I cannot tell you how he was changed and transformed by that experience. If I close my eyes, I can see his beaming face and smile as he told that story again and again.

Go back to the days of Jesus and skip to after the resurrection. Do you remember what some of the disciples did when Jesus left them for a while, before his final ascension to heaven? They went back to their old ways of living, including Peter who was raised so high by Jesus. The fishermen who were to fish for people were back to fishing. The risen Christ had to remind them again of who they were, what they were called to, and that being his followers was not a part-time vocation.

My friends in Christ, we too are not called to a part-time vocation of following Christ. We are called, each of us, no matter where we feel we fit in the Body of Christ, to not focus our minds and lives on human things, but the divine things.

And though it's tempting to think that means not caring about the things of this world, it actually means the opposite of that. One of my favorite verses is Romans 12:1-2. God tells us, "¹I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect."

How powerful to hear in a different way that we are to live as our spiritual act of worship. That what we do with our time, with our relationships with family and friends to stranger and even enemies, with our gifts, talents, and resources...with everything we have and are all are spiritual acts and when focused on God, spiritual acts of worship.

When we practice and learn to do more and more regularly the work of having our minds sent on the divine rather than the human things, thus having our minds transformed to see all the human things with a divine mindset, then we are able to more joyfully take up our cross and follow Jesus when we stand up for Jesus in standing up for those he stood up for; the oppressed, persecuted, abused, marginalized, rejected, exploited, labeled as less than or even unacceptable by God. When we deny ourselves, we lift up Christ in our lives and his saving Good News in what we say, how we act, how we give, how we spend our lives, the very lives God granted us.

When we see more and more with spiritual eyes and the perspective of Christ, then our minds are set on divine things more than on our own human desires and ways. We lose our lives in living it away to and for Christ and his call for us. In doing so, we find life in truly living as well as live into the ways that express that Christ has indeed saved us.

We were in for a spiritual crash that would have left us spiritual dead for sure. But Christ rescued us. And he rescued us not for a moment, not temporarily, but forever and for all of eternity.

So how do we respond? Not with a temporary appreciation. Not with giving a lot at one time or a little over a long time. Strangely, it's when we give it all, use it all, live it all, if you want to say, that we truly begin to live. Giving your all means loving God with all you have and all

that you are; loving God where you are with all you have, loving God in your strength and weakness; loving God when your heart is bursting with joy and broken with grief; loving God when you are so sure and confident as well as confused and filled with doubt; loving God with your entire soul which God has saved through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah, the Christ!

From what you deem as monumental moments in life to the mundane, with a mind set on the divine they all become spiritual acts of worship. From the seemingly insignificant acts and gestures unto total strangers to important deeds done unto family and friends, they all are seen and experienced as more than human but done unto God and thus divine.

When Jesus asks what it would profit us to gain the entire world but lose our very souls, we are being reminded today to reset our minds to see how we are living or not living.

What Jesus said last in this portion of Scripture is something I've honestly wrestled with, especially with what seems to be such hard words. I'm tempted to spin it to say something else more fitting to see how I want Jesus to be. I'm tempted to say, as Peter did, something like "No, Jesus. That's not what you really meant." But as I think more about myself as a parent, a friend, a volunteer, a leader and pastor, there are times when I say things that may seem not only harsh but also with a sense of warning and even of consequences. Though I have not said, nor plan on saying to anyone how disappointed I'd be if...and you fill in the rest of that sentence, it does take the practice of seeing with a spiritual perspective that Christ not only speaks the truth in love, but in ways at times that are very clear and direct.

The one who came to save the world as God incarnate through such suffering, rejection and death is not one who will hide the truths of life and death, spiritually speaking. I've yet met a doctor who is trying to save a life to mince words, speak ambiguously, as well as not tell the truth of the situation and possible outcomes. I've yet to meet a doctor who would speak such words without any care or compassion at all.

So, when we hear such words from the Great Physician, do so with a spiritual mindset seeing the Good Shepherd, the Lover of our souls, the one who not only cried over his lost sheep but died to save them. Then hear again his words, "Those who are ashamed of my and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with holy angels." May we all hear all that Christ says with such a mindset that is spiritually focused so that we may not only hear what Christ said, but fully and completely live as his disciples for him and the sake of the gospel. Amen.