**Mark 8:27-38 February 28, 2021**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from the Gospel of Mark the 8th chapter here re-reading these words. “And he began to teach them that he Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Lent is a more than just a season of repentance it is a season of focus. Focus on how we interpret the things of this world as Christians. We are all followers of Jesus Christ and fellow disciples of Jesus, disciples just like the men we heard about in our Gospel lesson this morning, and especially as Children of God who are being taught by our Heavenly Father through His Holy and perfect Son in His Holy and perfect Word. It’s easy to become distracted in this world and to lose focus on what’s really important for our culture continuously pushes out new and different types of thinking and living to distract us and tempt us away from our identity as God’s own children. That’s why Lent is as a very special time of year. It is a season of focus, and it points to the work of the one who came to teach his children that he didn’t come to save himself, but to save a sinful and adulterous generation by a single act of sacrifice.

An act of sacrifice that seems to be reiterated in all of our lessons, and our hymns, and our introit and Psalms, as we head toward Good Friday and Easter Sunday. This Gospel lesson is no different. A simple question is asked, and it’s more than just a question it’s an opportunity to teach. Peter shows bright promise as a loyal disciple of Jesus by declaring him to be the Christ. Mark is straight forward in his Gospel as we’ve seen in other lessons. He describes things with few words and direct meaning and Mark 8 is no different. He doesn’t relish any further explanation. Mark records what Peter said plainly, that Jesus was exactly what He said He was, the Christ, the promised one, the Savior and Messiah of the people all summarized in one simple word.

Now it shouldn’t be surprising that Mark records this monumental moment, after all it’s a shining high point of the Scriptures when we look at clear confessions of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Anybody would be proud of this moment, and would brag about it today in a personal blog, or post it on their own website or social media profile and have it beamed out to the entire world. But this declaration isn’t about bragging, it’s about teaching. Because immediately after Peter’s declaration Jesus begins to *teach* them. And there are words that stick out here that teach us as we read about it as His disciples today. This is a clear predication of Jesus passion. And what stands out is the fact that Mark records that Jesus taught the disciples not that he *was* going to suffer, die and rise again, or that he could, or that he might, or that he will, but he explicitly says that he *must* do these things! Now that’s a teaching moment. That is the focus of this Lenten season.

Because that isn’t something to brag about. And really if we look throughout Scripture it’s amazing to find, that there are many moments that stick out in the lives of the patriarchs, and prophets, and many other figures of the Bible, that really aren’t the high points of their lives. It’s amazing to think that the author of these books included these parts that speak so poorly of their character and point out the things that they have done wrong. If we took the Bible to be nothing more than an autobiography of different figures in history, or even as just a fantasy tale of stories that all fit together, it seems odd that these parts would be included. After all, why would Moses include a story about Abraham trying to pass Sarah off as his sister? That doesn’t make the great patriarch of God’s chosen people sound very good at all does it? Or why would David, the great and powerful King, allow the retelling of his affair of Bathsheba? And the murder of her husband Uriah? Why would he continue to talk about his sadness over this sin in his Psalms of lament? And this is just an example of the stories and retellings of things that happened in the lives of God’s chosen representatives and people that showed their imperfection and sin. And here, it is no different. Mark doesn’t shy away from the fact that Peter takes Jesus aside and rebukes the Son of God.

The fact that such stories are recorded should help us all understand the truth of Holy Scripture, and that is that this book is not a guide into how salvation can be earned on our own. The Word of God is focused on one thing, and that’s Christ’s death on the cross. The Bible stays focused, as we all are in this season of repentance on the fact that Jesus *had* to die on the cross, to make payment for the sin that *we* all have committed. And not just us but the sin of our parents and parents parents, and our family going all the way back to the Garden of Eden itself.

He had to go. Not on account of anything he had done, but because of our sin. Sin that showed itself in Abraham’s mistrust, in David’s lust and covetousness, in Peter’s confusion and rebuking of Jesus, and eventually his denial of Jesus 3 times. No one was perfect, look throughout the rest of Scripture, you won’t find any person that was able to earn salvation on their own, and escape the punishment of sin which is death. No one that is, except for Jesus Christ, who here in Mark 8 is teaching his disciples plainly that He must die and rise again, to save them from their sins.

I’ve always had a great respect for teachers, probably because it runs in my family. Many members of my family were and still are teachers. And the one thing that was constant between all of my family members who were teachers, when I would talk to them about their classes, is that they never had a perfect class of students. Many times they had a few students that were especially hard to teach, students who would get confused, would misunderstand, or would have to be constantly reminded of a key fact until they finally got it. Even students who rebelled against the teacher and the lesson and needed correcting and rebuking in order that they would learn something from their teacher.

So it is with us as God’s disciples and his children. So it was for Jesus, as we see him constantly teaching His disciples about the Kingdom of God, about the nature of who he was and why he came, and inevitably about the cross. For the cross is a teaching that we hear repeated and yet still must be taught about. The cross is a sign to us, especially during this season, of a two-fold truth in our lives. On the one hand the cross is a reminder of our sinfulness, and of our shame. It shows us our sin and the fact that the perfect Son of God came to this world, and was nailed to a cross, because of us. Because of our sin. Because of the times when we chose ourselves and our own happiness over what God has said is wrong. Because of the times when we have rebelled against God, and blamed God, and sinned against our neighbors, against our families, and especially against ourselves and our own bodies. That’s why he hung in pain. That’s why his blood dripped from the thorns in his forehead, because of us. Because of our sin. And because we put him there.

The cross is a reminder of our sinfulness and the nature of our hearts. But in God’s teaching of the cross we also see the reality of our identity as God’s children. We also see our life. We also see His love. For as Paul reminds us in the epistle lesson. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We have peace with God because of his sacrifice on the cross. And as Paul goes on to say, his love is so great for us because he saved us while we were still his enemy. For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die, but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. The cross is a sign of his love. A sign that despite our sin, and our shame, and our rebellion he still went to the cross because the only way that we would be saved from the punishment of sin was if he took on that punishment for us. When we see him stricken, smitten, and afflicted on the cross we see his love. We see his sacrifice for us. And we know without a shadow of a doubt that He loves us with a perfect love that puts our benefit before his own. The cross is the ultimate symbol of love, because on it our lives were saved, and by His death and resurrection we were made holy again.

But the teaching of the cross wasn’t easy to learn. Peter’s confusion was obvious from the start, and he was the boldest to take Jesus aside to rebuke him. But it wasn’t just Peter who was confused. None of the disciples truly understood until Christ rose again and met with them. Jesus had to teach them by rebuking them, as He does with Peter, and correcting them so that they understood clearly and plainly the truth of the Gospel.

So it is with us today. Too often we hear a portion of Scripture and believe that we understand all of the different aspects and teachings that are being told in them. We too must continue in our knowledge of the Scriptures and of God and His Will for us in our lives. And we must not be ashamed of Christ and his teaching. In a world that is filled with lies and distractions, we must stand tall and teach those around us about the truth of who Jesus is and why he came. We must teach them about the cross and how it shows us our sin and it reveals to us God’s love. And we must never be ashamed of this Gospel, for God has called us to stand in the light, and shine the light of Christ, so that His Word would reach out to all the corners of this world.

May God continue to keep you focused on the cross during this season of repentance and sorrow over sin. May the cross of Jesus Christ destroy in your hearts and minds any ego or sinful thought that salvation was found by anything you have done. May the cross bring you to repentance and to confession and humble you into understanding the teaching of Jesus Christ and the salvation that he has won for you. For the cross will remain our focus until the end of this season, and not just in that moment will we push it aside, but it will stay fixed in our eyes, until we go to be with Christ forever.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.