

Sermon: Rearranging the Furniture  
2 Lent, Year B  
Mark 8:31-38

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While I was growing up my mother used to love to rearrange the furniture in our house. She would usually solicit my help to move the couch where the chairs had been and to move the table where the couch had been. And my father would come home and groan and say, "Oh no, you've been at it again." My mom and I liked it though. This rearranging offered us a new perspective, a new way of seeing the old and offered a freshness to the daily routine. And yes, sometimes we tripped over the table that had not been there in the old arrangement and sometimes we'd attempt to throw our coats onto the chair that had previously been in one spot only to see them land on the floor.

Some of you may have noticed that a couple of months ago I rearranged the furniture in my office. I was ready for a change. Well, if you missed seeing the change, too bad, because I have already moved it back! It just didn't work. The feng shui just wasn't right. Sometimes you get it wrong. (George and Sharon, if you think one move that you helped with was bad, Steve had to help with both moving it and moving it back!)

In today's gospel passage from Mark, Jesus offers Peter a "rearranging" of sorts. Poor Peter really gets the "what for" from Jesus! Just prior to this passage, Jesus asks his disciples "Who do you say that I am?" and Peter makes the glorious declaration, "You are the Messiah." And while Peter is right in this statement, as we see in today's passage, he has a lot to learn about what this means.

Jesus teaches his disciples that he will undergo great suffering and be rejected by the religious leaders, and be killed and after three days rise again, all the events that we have come to know as taking place during Holy Week. Peter can't bear to hear these words about what Jesus will go through and he takes Jesus aside and rebukes him. Really, Peter? What nerve! But Jesus says back to Peter, "Get behind me Satan, For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." And to the larger crowd Jesus says if you want to follow me you will need to deny yourselves and take up your cross and follow me.

Peter, who deeply loves Jesus, makes an inappropriate response to the situation and is corrected by Jesus. And this is the way of discipleship. To love God, to make mistakes, to learn and to be willing to be corrected. To be open to change, to be open to transformation.

Somewhere I read recently that it is a terrible moment when you are in the middle of an argument and you realize you are wrong! How true. It's humbling, maddening, and sometimes even humiliating. And yet, Jesus says that those who want to save their life will lose it and those who lose their life for his sake and for the sake of the gospel will save it. Sometimes that means being willing to change our minds about things, things we may feel very passionate about.

At the Building Bridges for the Greater Good gathering Tuesday night, I heard a white woman tell a story. She said her ancestors had been Confederate officers during the civil war and she was proud of her heritage, and saw nothing wrong with having confederate statues that are so prevalent in Virginia. On the other hand, her daughter, who works in Charlottesville, felt that the confederate statues should be covered up. The woman was quite upset with her daughter until her daughter explained to her that these statues were erected during the Jim Crow era, at least in part, to intimidate black people. And the woman said that as she learned more, she *changed her mind* about the confederate statues. She said it was as if her head had been literally turned. Her inner furniture was being rearranged, her consciousness moving toward greater compassion for all people.

Then on Wednesday night, airing on television, there was a town hall meeting in Sunrise, FL, where surviving students and teachers from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School met with their legislators to address the tragic shooting of last week where 17 people died. Using their precious and courageous voices, their unwavering determination, wisdom and passion, these young people pressed for answers as to how a deranged person could just walk into their school with a dangerous weapon of war and kill so many people in an instant. They asked hard questions of their political leaders and wouldn't back down. At least one of the legislators said he was actually *reconsidering* his position on some of the common sense gun laws, that a vast majority of Americans seek. Perhaps he said it out of political pressure, but perhaps out of compassion and a concern for the greater good for all Americans. Perhaps his furniture was being rearranged, too.

One way we can develop compassion is through prayer. Centering prayer, that occurs here on Sunday nights and several of our members engage in daily, can be described as sitting in silence, letting all thoughts go, where we don't have an agenda, we're not asking God anything, not telling God to be a certain way and are just consenting for God to have access to our being. Some theologians describe Centering Prayer as a way for God to rearrange the interior space within. And that is a mysterious thing because we don't even really know what is out of whack, don't even know sometimes what needs to be rearranged. But God does. And it is with God's help that we can allow ourselves to be changed. Can move toward discipleship, toward really following Jesus.

To Re-think. To change our minds. To be willing to learn. This is what it will take to follow Jesus. Peter, with all of his shortcomings and faults had the humility to let Jesus teach him. He stumbled, fell, even denied Jesus at one point, and was **STILL** the man through whom Jesus chose to build his church. God is not finished with you and me yet. We will stumble and fall and, if with humility we are willing to learn, willing to change so that we can go with Jesus into the difficult places, we will get back up again. Letting God rearrange our inner furniture as we follow Jesus can be an adventure; it will involve suffering at times, it will involve stumbling and falling. But with God's strength we will become more compassionate people, as we share God's love with a world that so desperately needs it.

Amen.

