

## 2 Lent B

Gen. 17:1-7, 15-16; Rom. 4:13-25; Mark 8:31-38

This passage is often called the Hinge in Mark's Gospel because it closes the door on all the inherited expectations the Apostle's had for their Jewish Messiah and ushers in a new way of thinking about Jesus for them. On this second Sunday of Lent I believe it also hits us right between the eyes (so to speak) and wakes us up to the fact that the previous way we might have thought about things and people may not always be the right way.

I can just imagine the disciples debating and chattering about their understanding and expectations of Jesus. It is so interesting to note that after all they experienced with Jesus, they saw the new way he acted and they heard the new way he spoke of God (they had never heard anything like it) – YET, They still wanted to fit him into their traditional beliefs of the coming Messiah.

In fact, a few lines before our Gospel starts today what did Jesus ask his disciples?--he asked-- “Who do you say I am?”.

I believe Jesus heard his identity being discussed and debated and was praying that the Jewish Apostle’s had a new understanding of him. But Peter rebukes Jesus---imagine that-- with his old descriptions—his narrow minded, human response, to the predictions of death for his Savior.—when he takes Jesus aside, I can just see him now- he probably pats him on the back and says “look Jesus, your scaring all the others with your talk of suffering and crucifixion so, just cool it a little bit because suffering is not in our Messiah’s future” !

Peter is instantly rebuked. From now on, Jesus says, what you have been taught and believe about the Messiah is wrong. The warrior King you expect to restore the kingdom of David is really a non-violent servant who must suffer in the most heinous way.

The Apostle's expected liberation, freedom-- an end to Roman rule, an easy comfortable way of life and there's no pain involved in their future!

When Jesus says "Get behind me Satan!" I think he is saying two things, the first :Do not hinder what is God's will with your selfishness. Jesus lets the other disciples know---- that he considers Peter's closed -minded attempt to fit him into a box is a sin. There is no way they can understand divine things if they do not risk the Truth (with a capitol "T") of being uncomfortable.

This reminds me of the time:

I have a friend who was just ordained a priest in my home church many years ago, before my ordination, and one Sunday the readings included Exodus 3:5. This is in the story of the burning bush where God tells Moses to remove his sandals because the place on which he is standing is holy ground.

So, she put up signs on all the doors of the sanctuary that read, “remove your shoes, because the place on which you are standing is holy ground”- to really emphasize the passage. I happened to be the lay reader that day so I was there early and I watched as people came to the door, read the sign and got that same slack-jawed appearance I envisioned on the Apostle’s faces. They didn’t know whether to obey the sign and feel foolish or ignore it and risk embarrassment. Then a crowd began to form in front of the entrance and I could see some people taking their shoes off but many more were getting perturbed saying” She has to be crazy, asking me to take my shoes off” and “this just isn’t right” etc. etc.. Walking into the sanctuary with no shoes was definitely outside some peoples comfort zone. It was never done before, but once you think about it, the sanctuary IS sacred ground and it would be very appropriate for people to take their shoes off.

I believe this is the type of uneasiness Jesus wants us to experience.

The second thing Jesus is saying when he tells Peter to get behind him is that anyone who proclaims him to be the Messiah confesses they are his followers and his followers have to let Jesus lead. We along with Peter are told the path we want to share with Jesus should be unfamiliar, it should make us feel uncomfortable. Jesus did not go to Golgotha just so we could sit in the pews or in our case now sitting in front of the computer for an hour and listen to what we already know. He went to Golgotha so humanity could have a chance.

If we truly have followed him to the Cross, we will pick up where he left off and open channels of service in places we have never gone before. The road to the cross leads us far from our middle to upper class neighborhoods into the streets where the poor live, into the hospitals where the sick die, into the prisons where the condemned sit and wait. We should feel that twinge of uneasiness all along our way to spread the Gospel.

In fact, Jesus says the more untraditional and perturbed we feel on our spiritual journey -the more we can be assured that we are denying our wrongful ways and living the Truth (with a capital “T”) of his calling.

Because I believe Jesus knows if it were up to us he would have to fit perfectly into our zone of comfort. If we had our way Jesus would make his teachings easy to follow, they wouldn't require unfamiliar situations, they would agree with our lifestyles, and they certainly wouldn't cause us any pain. And if we had our way we would rest assured in our knowing that everything we did Jesus would consider right because, of course, that familiar box we keep him in is never wrong.

But, Jesus tells us this narrow-minded way of thinking about him is not his desire. Remember, we are not called to rest comfortably in our Christianity.

The Christ whom we confess as Our Messiah promises to lead us on an uneasy path towards salvation. We are called to take risks, big risks.

Today I hope you begin to ask yourself.... Am I willing to step outside my comfort zone (am I willing to risk not being right) and faithfully follow him on the way to the cross?

Amen.

