

## Sermon for Feb. 28, 2021 - The Second Sunday in Lent

### Gospel reading: Mark 8:27–38

#### Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ

27 And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” 28 And they told him, “John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.” 29 And he asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Christ.” 30 And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him.

#### Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection

31 And he began to teach them that the 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. 32 And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

**34** And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. **35** For whoever would save his life<sup>[a]</sup> will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. **36** For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? **37** For what can a man give in return for his soul? **38** For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

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We are living in Modern times...

25 years ago, I was introduced to the idea of “postmodernism,” the tail end of modernism... What comes next I’m not sure, but I think we can guess.

**Postmodernism** is a late 20th-century philosophical movement characterized by broad skepticism, subjectivism, or relativism; a general suspicion of reason; and institutional thinking.

It is a reaction against western thought and culture. It can be described as the straightforward denial of general philosophical viewpoints that were taken for granted during the 18th-century Enlightenment, although these viewpoints are not unique to that period. The most important of these western viewpoints are the following.

1 The existence of an objective reality. A reality that exists independent of human existence and perception. (The Post-Modernist would say: Reality is experienced in the mind, not objectively)

2. There is such a thing as objective truth.

(The Post-Modernist says: There is no objective truth, only subjective truth) Which is ironic because THAT would be an example of an objective truth. But what they mean is... “What is true for you is not necessarily true for me.”

3. Humanity can change itself for the better through science and technology.

(But some Post-Modernists will go so far as to say that science and technology—are inherently destructive and oppressive, because they have been used by “racist” people, especially during the 20th century, to destroy and oppress others.)

4. Modernists would assert that there is such a thing as human nature, inborn and hard-wired rather than learned through social constructs.

(Postmodernists insist that all, or nearly all, aspects of human psychology are determined socially)

An example of this would be how Human sexuality is seen as a fundamental part of a person's existence. However, there is a widespread belief among some sociologists that **gender**, as an aspect of sexuality, IS a socially constructed idea. This has entered into the popular culture so that according to a recent Cosmopolitan Magazine article, we must accept that there are at least 12 (if not as many as 81) separate gender expressions all equally valid and acceptable. In other words, it is backwards thinking to suggest that human sexuality is binary, as in man and woman. Rather human sexuality is on a sliding scale of self-perception. You are whatever you think you are.

5. We will end with the modernist idea that language refers to and represents an OUTSIDE reality.

Postmodernists claim: the meaning of a word is not a static thing in the world or even an idea in the mind but rather a range of contrasts and differences with the meanings of all words.

Let me make this easy. The Modernist might say... "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet..."

You can call a rose, by another name, but the rose remains the same. It doesn't change.

The Postmodernist will argue: "There is no 'rose'"

THERE are more than these five, I mention, but you get the idea...

The French Philosopher Renee Descartes, took this view of existence. "I think, Therefore, I am"

He was attempting to identify a foundation of certainty on which to build the evidence for empirical/scientific knowledge.

"I am able to think. And therefore I must have existence"

"I am able to DO therefore I exist"

Facing the dilemma of Post-Modernism, I began to think we need to RE-frame Descartes.

That's when I developed the two great questions that I think most reflect the times we are living in...

WHO AM I? (and)

WHAT AM I DOING HERE?

And don't you know, these just happen to be the same questions that Jesus is asking his disciples.

The thing is, Jesus already KNOWS who HE is, and He KNOWS what HE is doing here.

But he makes his disciples wrestle with the questions by asking...

WHO DO THE PEOPLE SAY THAT I AM? WHO DO YOU SAY?

I find it interesting that they KNOW that Jesus is the Christ. But it's apparent that they don't know what that means. That's the primary reason Jesus strongly cautions them to keep their mouths shut about it.

He must tell them who He is and what he has come to do... YES. I AM the Christ. And THIS is what it means...

"The 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 to them...

And they don't like hearing the truth. They reject it, especially Peter.

Jesus has to say to him... and the others

"Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

And he called the crowd to him, with his disciples and said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

There is loads of foreshadowing there, but I don't think it's going over their heads. I think "Take up your cross and follow" is an idiom they would have been familiar with, since Roman Crucifixion was a well-practiced form of punishment. Why Jesus was using at this moment might have gone over their heads, but they would have recognized the imagery he was using... "Jesus told them plainly," Mark tells us. He was going to be crucified. This is one of these things that were coming that they were not ready to hear. But they would need to know. Even if they didn't quite believe it yet.

For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.

Now Jesus is beginning to them who THEY ARE and WHAT THEY ARE DOING HERE....

As His disciples they would not escape death by trying to do things THEIR WAY. BUT in Following HIS WAY they would save their lives. Eternally.

For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? For what can a man give in exchange for his life?

Jesus is telling them, telling US that there is an OBJECTIVE REALTY and that there ARE OBJECTIVE TRUTHS.

That if they buy into the notion that there are alternative realities or alternate truths, we are left without promise or assurances.

Thomas Moore said: If we lived in a state where virtue was profitable, common sense would make us saintly. But since we see that abhorrence, anger, pride, and stupidity commonly profit far beyond charity, modesty, justice, and thought, perhaps we must stand fast a little -even at the risk of being Martyred...

These words are an encouraging argument to nobility in our behavior... Jesus says,

"For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

And that is where our gospel lesson ends today on a word of warning to his disciples NOT to follow the pattern of the world but to hold fast to the Truth of the Gospel. For all the world is turning away, deconstructing the culture of the west, which is built upon the principles of Christendom.

The desire is to throw out the baby with the bathwater, believing that Western Culture is inseparable from Christianity, because it was so heavily influenced by Christianity. Therefore it should all be discarded as rot.

"It's all relative," says the post-modernist.

"Relativity signifies contempt for fixed categories. And for those who claim to be the bearers of objective, immortal truths there is nothing more relativistic than Fascist attitudes and activities. From the fact that all ideologies are of equal value, we Fascists conclude that we have the right to create our own ideology and enforce it with all the energy of which we are capable."

(Benito Mussolini 1921)

Creating their own reality, their own truths, but without God... or the need for any God except themselves or those they make.

The Darwinian answer to who we are and what we are doing here. That is what has led us here, to today. And the fall of Rome all over again, the Protestant Version... and perhaps to be followed by the emergence of a New Dark Ages, or such like...

But Christ is not merely IN our culture but OVER all culture. Nations and Empires come and go. But the Gates of Hell will not prevail against the Gospel of the Lord our God.

Be not ashamed of the Gospel.

Romans 1:16-17

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The righteous man shall LIVE by faith."