

No Sugar-Coated Fairy Tale Here

24th Week of Ordinary Time – Mark 8:27-35

We all want a happy ending....right? We want the bad guy caught, the natural disaster to cease and the lost child to come home. We don't like the idea that in life there is a mixture of joy and sorrow. That is the message for today's gospel. If we want to follow Jesus, then we will need to realize it comes at a cost. Jesus is not magical. Jesus is not a superhero. Jesus is real. That means that our life with him is real. It is filled with both joy and sorrow. Jesus is not a sugar-coated fairy tale. Instead, Jesus is God. Jesus is the suffering Messiah who offers us eternal salvation, a far more reaching and far more important truth for us to consider this day.

The gospel writer, Mark, tells this story about Jesus walking with his disciples. One can imagine the scene and the conversation. The disciples might be discussing the day, concerns about the weather and maybe questioning where they will spend the night. Their focus might be the last miracle when Jesus cured the deaf-mute and the responses that they are hearing from the crowds that seek Jesus' compassion. In the middle of this journey, Jesus asks them a rather interesting question, **"Who do the people say that I am?"** The disciples are enthusiastic. They reply, **"John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others one of the prophets."** Jesus' reputation had spread far and wide so the disciples have probably overheard this talk in the villages and towns along their way. Jesus ventures a new question, a question every disciple (including you and me) must answer, **"But who do you say that I am?"**

This is a loaded question. Jesus is trying to figure out what they have come to believe about him. Peter's response is bold. **"You are the Christ."** This answer has far reaching repercussions. In essence, Peter has declared that Jesus is the promised Messiah. This idea is so important that Jesus **"warned them not to tell anyone about him."** Their joy and celebration over this proclamation was short lived because Jesus outlines what that truth really means for him, for them, for us. **"He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and rise after three days."**

Jesus' has just described his own passion, death and resurrection. What a shock this would have been to the twelve. It is such a shock that Peter tries to argue with him. But Jesus rebuked Peter and said, **"Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."** Peter, like you and me, wants a happy ending. Peter wants the glory and the fame that comes from all that is good. Peter, like all of us, can't quite understand any reason why there is suffering in the world. It doesn't make sense that the Messiah would suffer. Or does it?

If we wish to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, then we must be willing to follow his invitation that **"Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it."** To be a Christian does not exempt us from suffering, work, discipline or justice. Rather we are called to loving, sacrificial service to all our brothers and sisters. In so doing, we build the Kingdom, not the fairy-tale one, but the eternal Kingdom of God, where our suffering is transformative, moving us toward the eternal joy of heaven.

Blessings!

Sue Schettler