

## LENT 2, YEAR B

The Gospel Mark 8:31-38

Jesus began to teach his disciples that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

**Prayer:** In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

**Sermon:**

Although the Bible is the central Christian scripture,  
people don't agree on it.

Many Christians see The Bible as one big book,  
dictated by God to the ears of its 40 (or so) authors.

But it's actually a collection of books, written over centuries.  
printed in one volume for convenience and economy.

Some Christians believe the King James is  
the only "true version.

Even though it was printed in 1611,  
by an Anglican King.

The Catholic Old Testament has 46 books.

Most others have 39.<sup>i</sup>

Today we read from Mark,  
who hung out with Simon Peter.

Peter was sort of a boisterous and vibrant leader.

Everyone was shocked when he was martyred, in Rome.

*Mark took it really hard.*

With Peter gone some people thought Jesus  
would come back soon.<sup>ii</sup>

But he didn't.

So Mark, collected Peter's thoughts and stories,  
"for the record". That record became Mark's Gospel.

Mark's Gospel has a unique awareness of time.<sup>iii</sup>

Everything tends to happen fast.

Mark often uses the Greek word for "immediately",  
to describe Jesus' actions...

It's like The Lord was frantically bouncing  
from one thing to another.

And in his final chapters,

Mark measures time by military standards:

1<sup>st</sup> watch, ... 2<sup>nd</sup> watch ...

Peter denied Jesus when the cock crowed twice.

Dawn. 6:00 am. 1<sup>st</sup> watch.

Mark measured time as carefully as he could,

*because his Gospel is about God's intervention  
in human time and in history.*

*Time really matters.*

Jesus rebuked Peter, saying

“...you are setting your mind ... on human things.”

*Human time and human things do really matter.*

*But all things will pass. Only God's Kingdom endures.*

*Time really matters.*

So, Jesus asks us to focus

our work and our love and our energy,

Not on today and tomorrow, and not on mere stuff,  
but on eternity.

A diamond expert took his seat in 1<sup>st</sup> class,  
flying home to New York.

His heart fluttered a bit when he saw that  
he was seated next to a beautiful young woman.

Even better, he couldn't help noticing her huge diamond ring.

And so, after a while, he politely introduced himself, and said,

*"I noticed your beautiful stone. I'm an expert.  
Please tell me about that wonderful diamond."*

The young woman, with a deep sigh, gently responded, saying:

*"This is the famous Klopman diamond.  
It's one of the largest in the world.  
But it came with a strange curse."*

*"Wow" he said, "What is the curse of the Klopman diamond??"*

As the man nervously held his breath.

The beautiful girl thoughtfully looked out the window,  
at the earth so far below.

After a long moment, while the woman stared out the window,  
the impatient diamond expert, asked her again,

*"What is the curse of the Klopman diamond?"*

And, she replied, *"What's the curse? ... It's Mr. Klopman."*

*Sometimes the curse of things that we value,  
Can steal our heart and our soul.*

We might hear someone say, “*I’d die*” for this or for that.  
Maybe a car, or a McMansion in California.<sup>iv</sup>  
That’s the way of our World.

But Jesus doesn’t ask us to decide what we *would die for*.  
Jesus asks us to decide ... *what we would live for*.  
That’s the way of the Lord!

When we gather as a community of believers,  
we sometimes find the life the Jesus calls us to live.  
And we get a glimpse of our heavenly home.

I saw a glimpse this past week,  
when a small group of our women and men,  
set aside their aches and pains and differences,  
to work together,

To squelch the waters spraying wildly from  
3 separate broken, frozen pipes,  
On three separate days.

Like people must have done after Noah’s great flood,  
They cleaned up the mess that the waters left behind.

Jesus calls each of us to live, not for ourselves, but for others.  
To depend not on our own strength and wit,  
but on the strength of our community  
and the power of our Creator God.<sup>v</sup>

We are called to set our minds on divine things,  
not human things.

Not on this Kingdom but on the Kingdom of Heaven.

In Greek, the phrase "Kingdom of Heaven" describes a place  
where everyone is free to gather. *Come as you are.*

In Aramaic<sup>vi</sup>, that Kingdom is less a place,  
And is more the concept of reigning or rule.

*In either language,  
The Kingdom of God is where Our God Reigns.  
And over what does God reign?  
God reigns over our hearts.*

The beautiful girl, sitting in 1<sup>st</sup> class,  
was trying to be left alone.  
She was trying to sort things out.

She'd given her heart to a cursed diamond.  
And that thing reigned over her,  
no matter where she went.

*But our God reigns! Over Whom?  
Over us. God's people.*

At our absolute best, we are gathered to serve God's Kingdom,  
free of worry about our stuff, our gender,  
our rank, our beauty, our age ... because  
God is the King of our hearts.

Some folks are waiting for the End Times.

*Not me. Because the Kingdom is already here.*

Not in its eventual fullness, but it's here. *Right now.*

We are not called to strain towards an uncertain future.

We are called to embrace the gift of life ... today.

Let's focus on right now.

Right here. We've plenty to do.

When we look too far ahead, we can lose sight of God,

and we can lose track of our community,

and the people we are called to be.

**Let's not do that!**

**Let's be the people we are called to be!**

**-AMEN**

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<sup>i</sup> Both have 27 New Testament books. Moreover, the Episcopal Church recognizes additional books, called the Apocrypha – they are said to be useful for examples of a life well lived and for instruction of manners; but not to establish any doctrine.

Moreover, while Christians look only to the Bible, Catholics also look to other forms of Divine revelation.

<sup>ii</sup> See, 1 Peter 4:7 “The end of the world is coming soon. Therefore, be earnest and disciplined in your prayers.” (NLT)

<sup>iii</sup> Thousands of years before any useful timepiece existed.

<sup>iv</sup>

Too many lawyers in football  
Baseballs gotta few ...  
Pitcher threw his arm away  
and the quarterback burned his knee  
And this they did so they could live the American dream....

- Hank Williams Jr. - *American Dream* Lyrics

<sup>v</sup> The courage of His Son, and the wisdom of His Holy Spirit.

<sup>vi</sup> Jesus surely spoke Aramaic. In that language the phrase is *malkut shemayi*.