

YOU ARE THE CHRIST!
Sermon for the 2nd Sunday in Lent, 2021
Mark 8:27-38

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel read before, Mark 8:27-38: ²⁷ **Then Jesus went away with His disciples to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way He asked His disciples, “Who do people say I am?”**

²⁸ **They answered Him, “John the Baptist, but others say Elijah, and others say one of the other prophets.”**

²⁹ **He asked them, “You, however, who do you say I am?”**

Peter answered Him, “You are the Christ!”

³⁰ **He strictly warned them not to tell anyone about Him.**

³¹ **Then Jesus began to teach them that it was necessary for the Son of Man to suffer greatly, to be rejected by the elders, Chief Priests and scribes, to be killed and, after three days, to rise again.** ³² **He was speaking frankly about this, and Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him.** ³³ **However, Jesus turned around, looked at His disciples and rebuked Peter, saying, “Get behind Me, Satan! For you do not have in mind the things of God but the things of men.”**

³⁴ **When He had called the crowd to Him together with His disciples, He told them: “If anyone wants to follow Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me!** ³⁵ **For whoever wants to save his life will lose it; but whoever will lose his life for My sake and for the sake of the Good News will save it.** ³⁶ **For what good does it do a person to gain the whole world and yet lose his own soul?** ³⁷ **For what is a person to give in exchange for his soul?**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

There were times in Jesus’ ministry when He would take His disciples to some private place in order to further instruct them. We find Him doing this today.

Jesus had just healed a blind man at Bethsaida, on the north-eastern end of the Sea of Galilee, not too far from where He had earlier fed the five thousand.¹ To get away from the crowds, Jesus left Jewish territory completely and “**went away with His disciples to the villages around Caesarea Philippi**,” about 40 kilometres north of Bethsaida. Jesus was now ready to tell the disciples about His upcoming suffering, death, and resurrection, telling them this in a more private setting.

Jesus took advantage of the walk to the villages of Caesarea Philippi and began teaching them as they walked. “**On the way He asked His disciples, “Who do people say I am?”**” This was a very typical teaching method on that day. Many teachers still use this method even today. Ask a question. Then guide the discussion as the students struggle with their answer. Students can learn many things as they are guided to the right answer.

The disciples responded with the answers they had heard as they travelled with Jesus. They said, “**John the Baptist, but others say Elijah, and others say one of the other prophets.**” While these answers are all wrong, they do show high respect for Jesus. They were answers given by those who were taking a serious look at Christ. For them, He was more than just another teacher; He was clearly bringing a message from God Himself. Yet all these answers made Jesus out to be a man and no more. They were inadequate.

After the first question comes a really important one from Jesus meant not only for the disciples back then but also for His disciples today. “**He asked them, “You, however, who do you say I am?”**” It is very important that the disciples have the right answer to this question. Again, not only the disciples back then, but also disciples today. It is important that we have the right answer to this question. “**You, however, who do you say I am?”**”

Peter answered Him, “You are the Christ!” Peter’s words are exactly right. But did he understand them? The Greek word *Christ* is the same as the Hebrew word *Messiah* and means “the Anointed One,” one consecrated and appointed by God. These simple words spoken by Peter are easy to say, but understanding these words may take a lifetime. Peter said the exact right words, but he will soon demonstrate that he didn’t have a clue what they meant.

Mark writes, “**Then Jesus began to teach them that it was necessary for the Son of Man to suffer greatly, to be rejected by the elders, Chief Priests and scribes, to be killed and, after three days, to rise again.** ³² **He was**

¹ Matthew 14:13-21

speaking frankly about this....” Now that we have Peter’s answer, **“You are the Christ!”** Jesus began to teach them exactly what it means to *be* the Christ. Christ’s work of salvation, His death and resurrection would be not only for the disciples but also for us. This is His work. This is the work that defines what it means to be the Christ.

How did Peter respond to the very heart of what it means to be the Christ? **“Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him.”** The word *rebuke* is not a word that we use a lot. It means *to scold*. It means that Peter took Jesus aside and began to *criticise Him*. Peter, the simple fisherman, was scolding the Son of God.

Peter didn’t know it, but He was acting as Satan’s agent to tempt Jesus. Remember last week how we saw Satan trying to tempt Jesus out in the wilderness? In his Gospel, Luke writes that after his failed attempts to tempt Jesus, Satan *“left Him until another opportunity would present itself”* (Luke 4:13). Here is one of those opportunities. The heart of Satan’s temptation was all about getting Jesus to avoid the cross. Peter was actually scolding Jesus for talking about suffering and dying. Since suffering and dying are how Jesus earns our forgiveness, Peter was trying to convince Jesus *not* to do the work that forgives our sins. Peter was doing exactly what Satan wanted.

Jesus recognised the temptation immediately. He would have nothing to do with it. **“Jesus turned around, looked at His disciples and rebuked Peter, saying, “Get behind Me, Satan! For you do not have in mind the things of God but the things of men.”** Jesus recognised the words of Satan coming out of Peter’s mouth and stopped him in no uncertain terms.

Here we see Jesus demonstrate the *proper* way to be judgmental and stern. Jesus loves Peter - so much so that He was going to die for him. He does not want Peter to be an agent of Satan. He wants Peter to be His apostle. He loves Peter enough to warn him of the danger that he is in. He loves Peter enough to pull him back from his sin. Jesus loves Peter enough to use stern, strong language to bring him back into His fold.

Jesus had a warning for the rest of the disciples and the crowds as well. **“³⁴ When He had called the crowd to Him together with His disciples, He told them: “If anyone wants to follow Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me! ³⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it; but whoever will lose his life for My sake and for the sake of the Good News will save it. ³⁶ For what good does it do a person to gain the whole world and yet lose his own soul? ³⁷ For what is a person to give in exchange for his soul?”**

Following Christ means denying oneself, that is, refusing to make oneself the sole object in one’s life and instead making God and His will the centre of one’s life. That will always involve sacrifices, avoiding everything that may come between our Saviour and us², even taking up a cross and being ready to suffer shame and even death to remain faithful to Him.

Mark’s first readers had already experienced that in their lives and were to experience even more. Christians today also are not being spared. In many countries, they are being persecuted because of their faith. In our own country, we see atheistic propaganda growing more powerful. We see our country legalising murder and demeaning what God’s Word clearly says about marriage as between man and woman. We are even beginning to see the birth of censorship coming upon the church in the State of Victoria regarding how it is to deal with people struggling with their gender identity. We could go on, but the point is that the cross and being loyal to Christ always go together,³ which leads to the question: *Is the Christian life worthwhile?*

Christ tells us that whoever denies Him and seeks to salvage a beautiful earthly existence will lose his life. That person will end up in hell. Losing one’s earthly life for Christ and the Gospel means keeping eternal life. Most of us today are not asked to offer great sacrifices. By taking the Lord’s promise of eternal life into consideration, we may easily answer our Lord’s following two questions: **“what good does it do a person to gain the whole world and yet lose his own soul?”** and **“what is a person to give in exchange for his soul?”** Possessing the whole world - and who achieves that? - is not worth losing one’s soul, but the sad fact is that *many will sacrifice their salvation for a great deal less.*

Jesus promises eternal life in the presence of God and His mercy and grace. This does not mean that we shall live lives of luxury in this sin-filled world. Instead, Jesus compares the life of this world to carrying a cross - an instrument of torture and death.

How often are we like Peter? How often do we make decisions based on what *appears* successful in this world instead of checking the Word of God? How often do we *assume* things about God without checking the words that He

² Mark 7:20-23

³ 1 Peter 4:12-16

Himself has given to us? How often do we, like Peter, proceed in the way that *we think* is best and forget that God may have something totally different for us? How often do we follow in Peter's footsteps by following our own thoughts instead of the Word of God?

How glad we must be that Jesus didn't listen to Peter! Jesus followed up on His promise. He went to Jerusalem, and there the elders and the chief priests and the scribes did exactly what He said they would do. They arrested Jesus and held a mock trial. Then they took Jesus to Pontius Pilate and used political pressure to have Him crucified. Jesus died just as He said He would, and then He also rose just as He said He would. Jesus did all this to take away our sin and give us His righteousness instead. Because Jesus did not listen to Peter but followed through on His plan, we now have forgiveness, life, and salvation.

It is interesting to recall that the Mark who wrote today's text was a disciple of Peter, the same Peter in today's Gospel. Interestingly, Mark's account of these events left out a few things. According to Mark, Jesus asked: **"You, however, who do you say I am?" Peter answered Him, "You are the Christ!"**

According to Matthew, *He asked them, "You, however, who do you say I am?"*

¹⁶ *Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

¹⁷ *Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah! For flesh and blood have not revealed this to you, but My Father, who is in heaven" (Matthew 16:15-17).*

According to Matthew, Jesus praised God the Father for revealing the right answer to Peter, but Mark's account does not include Jesus' praise to the Father for giving Peter the right answer. Why did Peter leave this out when he told it to Mark? We don't know. Did the Holy Spirit working through Peter tell Mark to focus on Peter the sinner and agent of Satan? That way, those who heard this Gospel account would better understand the generosity of Christ's salvation, that, despite Peter's great sin, Jesus suffered, died, and rose for him anyway. That if Jesus can redeem Peter, the agent of Satan, He can certainly redeem us.

Mark's account is very clear. **"Then Jesus began to teach them that it was necessary for the Son of Man to suffer greatly, to be rejected by the elders, Chief Priests and scribes, to be killed and, after three days, to rise again."** ³² **He was speaking frankly about this.** There is no speculation or doubt here. This is what it means to be the Christ. This is what it means to be our Saviour. Jesus has suffered all these things for us.

When we talk about Jesus, it is very important that we talk about the right Jesus, the Jesus who suffered **"greatly, to be rejected by the elders, Chief Priests and scribes, to be killed and, after three days, to rise again."** The only Christ who can save us for eternity is the true Christ, the Christ crucified and risen from the dead. It is in this Christ and this Christ alone that we have eternal life, and it is this Christ that we confess to each other and to the world. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we praise You for Your marvellous grace to sinful people. You dwell in a light that no one can approach, but You have now shown Yourself to us in Your Son Jesus Christ. Through Him we approach You confidently as Your dear children. You are the Creator and Ruler of this vast universe, yet You are concerned for the happiness and good of each one of us. Accept our humble worship and praise, and grant that we may continue in our gracious fellowship with You through Jesus Christ.

We thank You, Father, that You have chosen us not to suffer Your anger, but to receive Your forgiveness, and to possess salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died and rose again for us. Move us to hear and obey Your Son through whom You have spoken to us. Move us to follow the example that Jesus has given us. Open our hearts, that Jesus may continue to live in them. Grant that we may cling to Jesus as the only way through which people may come into Your glorious presence. Move us, both by the way in which You shape our lives, and through Your promises in the Gospel, to make our own commitment to You, in love, praise, and adoration.

Grant that we may walk in obedience to Your commandments, test all things by Your Word, cling to what is good, and have nothing to do with any kind of evil. Make us holy by Your Spirit to live the life of holiness, to which Christ has called us, and keep us free of all fault until His coming.

Father, since You desire all people to be saved and to come to know the truth, give us opportunities to proclaim Your Gospel to the ends of the earth. Continue to bless the AELC and the ULMA. Inspire us to work, pray, and give for the salvation of people who as yet do not know You.

Grant that all in authority in our country may respect Your holy will. Protect from harm those who are in danger. Give peace and harmony to the nations on earth.

Make our homes harmonious places where the Holy Spirit is present with His power and wisdom. Give spiritual insight to all mothers. Grant all fathers godly leadership. Give all children an obedient spirit.

Look with compassion on the parched earth and send us abundant rain.

Have mercy on all who have gathered here today. Support the weak; correct the disobedient. Comfort us whenever we are troubled in body, mind, or spirit. We ask these things, and everything else we need, in the name of Your Son Jesus, who gave His life as a ransom for us all. Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

¹ When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and told him: "I am God Almighty. Live in My presence and be blameless! ² I shall make My Covenant between Me and you and shall give you very many descendants."

³ Abram fell face-down, and God spoke to him: ⁴ "This is My very own Covenant with you. You will be the father of many nations. ⁵ You will not be called 'Abram' any longer, but your name will be 'Abraham,' because I have made you a father of many nations. ⁶ I shall make you extremely fruitful, I shall make nations of you and kings will come from you. ⁷ I shall establish My Covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you for generations to come. It will be an everlasting Covenant, that I may be your God and the God of your descendants after you..."

¹⁵ God also told Abraham: "As for your wife Sarai, you shall not call her 'Sarai,' but her name shall be 'Sarah'! ¹⁶ I shall bless her and have also given you a son from her. I shall bless her, and she will become the mother of nations. Kings of peoples will come from her."

Romans 5:1-11

¹ Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only that, but we also glory in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance, ⁴ and perseverance produces character, and character, hope. ⁵ Hope does not disappoint us either, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to us. ⁶ For, while we were still helpless, at the set time Christ died for ungodly people. ⁷ For very rarely will someone die for a righteous person, although someone might perhaps even dare to die for a good person. ⁸ However, God shows His own love for us by this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Much more, therefore, now that we have

been justified by His blood, we shall be saved through Him from God's wrath. ¹⁰ For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, now that we have been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. ¹¹ Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Mark 8:27-38

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