

Enough Already Shut-Up, Learn and Live

16 Pentecost B Sept 12, 2021 Rev. Dr. David Gardner Tweed

First Reading: Isaiah 50:4-9a

The image of the servant of the Lord is one of the notable motifs in the book of Isaiah. Today's reading describes the mission of the servant, whom early Christians associated with Jesus.

⁴The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning the Lord God awakens—wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. ⁵The Lord God has opened my ear, & I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. ⁶I gave my back to those who struck me, & my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult & spitting. ⁷The Lord God helps me; therefore, I have not been disgraced; therefore, I have set my face like flint, & I know that I shall not be put to shame; ⁸the one who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. ^{9a}It is the Lord God who helps me; who will declare me guilty?

Gospel: Mark 8:27-38

This story provides the turning point in Mark. Peter is the 1st human being to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah, but he cannot accept that as the Messiah Jesus will have to suffer. Moreover, Jesus issues a strong challenge to all by connecting discipleship & the cross.

²⁷Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; & on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” ²⁸& they answered him, “John the Baptist; & others, Elijah; & still others, one of the prophets.” ²⁹Jesus asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” ³⁰& he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him. ³¹Then he began to teach them that the Son-of-Man must undergo great suffering, & be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, & the scribes, & be killed, & after three days rise again. ³²He said all this quite openly. & Peter took him aside & began to rebuke him. ³³But turning & looking at his disciples, Jesus rebuked Peter & said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” ³⁴Jesus called the crowd with his disciples, & said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves & take up their cross & follow me. ³⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, & those who lose their life for my sake, & for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world & forfeit their life? ³⁷Indeed,

what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸Those who are ashamed of me & of my words in this adulterous & 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.”

Overview - An Unexpected Kind of Messiah

Today we hear from teachers. The prophet Isaiah calls himself a teacher, one whose words sustain weary people. Jesus, the teacher, keeps the disciples quiet about any Messiah identity but speaks openly about his own suffering, death, & resurrection. Peter tries to counsel Jesus that no one willingly chooses to go along with that kind of plan. Nobody likes a loser. Jesus responds that Peter has lost sight of what is most important in life. Jesus teaches the disciples that they will lose their life for the sake of the gospel. Jesus invites people of faith & those who doubt Jesus' way to engage rather than avoid, conquer, or escape. What practices will help worshipers today to imagine the ways they are being called to “lose” their life in order to save it? From what does Jesus want to free people so that they will be able to pick up a different kind of burden & follow him? Then & now, Jesus invites followers on the way of the cross—a path of daily learning, dying, & new life. **Theological Reflection**

Peter's confession & denial both come from the same tongue, the same heart, the same man. Cephas, the Rock, becomes both a steppingstone & a stumbling stone: he confesses his belief in Christ, then denies the way of the cross that Jesus must walk. The gospel reading draws attention to the many choices & perspectives available to all of us. The theology of the cross is illustrated as we see Jesus walking the road to Jerusalem, the place of his humiliating death & his glorification. Though Christ will pray for release from his suffering, he is obedient to the point of death (Phil. 2:8). In Peter & Jesus we clearly see the duality of our own natures, & find strength to bear the cross of obedience.

[Isaiah 50:4-9a](#)

Second Isaiah, probably arising during the exile about 550 bce, includes 4 “Servant Songs” in which Israel itself, described as God's servant, is chosen & anointed with God's Spirit to bring justice to the people. This third Servant Song, is spoken in the first person & emphasizes the humiliation endured, described as a teacher, whose trust is in God. We are called to stand with Jesus no matter what conflicts we encounter, for we will receive God's help.

[Mark 8:27-38](#)

We gather with Jesus' disciples to acclaim Jesus as the one God has anointed to save us, yet we too often prefer a human interpretation to the divine one. Christians are invited to live with countercultural values. Christians are set in the end time, the beginning of the conclusion of human suffering & injustice, which is seen 1st in the resurrection of Jesus. Written in about 70 ce, Mark's gospel includes 3 passion predictions, of which Ch. 8 includes the 1st. That the Messiah will die reverses religious expectations. The passage indicates that Mark's community & the others for whom he wrote saw Jesus as the eschatological Son of Man, whose appearance marked the beginning of the end. But even Peter, accepted as an early leader of the church, finds the crucifixion a crisis for his faith. Mark situates the conversation north of Galilee, in a mixed Jewish-Gentile area. For the 1st time in Mark's gospel, Jesus accepts the title Messiah, that is, the Anointed One awaited by the Jews. Mark's call to take up the cross indicates that his community anticipated persecution.

Mark 8:27–38 is this Gospel's most verbally abusive passage. 3 times Jesus or Peter tells the other to "shut up" (*epitimaō*): the same verb that stifles demons & a gale (1:25; 3:12; 4:39; 9:25). Its 1st occurrence is smothering the disciples' correct ascription of messiahship to Jesus (see 1:1; 14:61-62). For the 1st & only time in Mark, Peter & peers recognize their teacher, but Jesus commands them to say nothing to anyone (8:30; see also 1:34; 3:12). After Jesus plainly explains to them all that the Son of Man must suffer, Peter shuts him up (8:3-32). "Turning & seeing his disciples, he shuts up Peter: Get behind me, Satan. You're setting your mind not on divine things but on human things". Only here in Mark does Jesus address an adversary as Satan—and it's the first of the Twelve whom he summoned (1:16). The language grates, not just because the stakes are life & death, but because Jesus upends everything we expect a messiah to be & to do for us. First-century Jewish messianic hopes varied, but none of them expected a messiah crucified by elders (lay leaders), chief priests (tall-steeple preachers), & scribes (biblical scholars). Writings like 4 Ezra (11-12), 2 Baruch (40, 72), & Qumran's Damascus Document (6.7-11) dreamt of idealized rulers who would judge the wicked & restore Israel's righteous. None of these messiahs handed their followers a cross to be shouldered en route to their own Golgothas. In no Gospel does Jesus say, "It is my responsibility to die for you, while you applaud my heroism." Instead: "The Son of Man is ordained by God to suffer, die, & be raised. & so are his followers. Are you coming?"