

“For Love’s Sake”

Mark 8:31-38

**Part III of X in the Sermon Series
“The Journey Back to Love”**

The Rev. Emily Krause Corzine
Associate Minister

February 28, 2021

From the Pulpit

The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
444 East Broad Street, Columbus, OH 43215

Phone: 614.228.1741 Fax: 614.461.1741

Email: home@first-church.org

Website: <http://www.first-church.org>

“For Love’s Sake”

Mark 8:31-38

+++++

Prayer for Illumination: Holy God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, illumine these words read and proclaimed. Silence in us any voice but your own. May we hear with joy what you have for us this day. Amen.

+++++

I don’t know about you, but I wonder how the disciples might have reminisced about the events in today’s text. A few years after Jesus’ death and resurrection, when the disciples are all together, around the campfire. What do they would say about this day? Maybe they are talking about the good old days, laughing, teasing, reliving the moments the way friends who have share a life changing experience often do.

One of them looks over at Peter and says, “Hey Satan, tell us about the day you rebuked Jesus! Remember that day?”

Another responds, “Yeah, how’d that work out for you?”

Another, “What were you thinking, Peter?”

Peter responds, ‘You know I just didn’t like where he was going with that. When I signed up to fish for women and men, this is

not what I had in mind. Great suffering, rejection, death; that's not what I signed up for. That's not who I thought the Messiah would be. Plus – even if he was thinking it – did he actually have to say it outloud!"

The others got quiet, reflecting on that day, like it was yesterday.

What do you think Peter really said to Jesus that day?

- “Hey Jesus, what you said right there in front of everyone – your message is a little strong.
- I am going to have to disagree with you on that suffering and death talk you had out there.
- That message just isn't going to fly.

It's like Peter is a campaign manager.

Peter pulls Jesus out of line before he says something he'll regret. “You know, Jesus – you may want soften your tone and not repeat what you said right there.”

Peter wasn't saying anything that the others weren't thinking too. Jesus' message cuts too deep, right to the core.

Jesus has a very different understanding of discipleship than what most of them probably wanted.

When Jesus' reality and vision begins to conflict with and take over our own, we do what Peter did....we rebuke. We take someone aside to enlighten her, to help her understand, to show him the error of his ways. That's all Peter did. Right?

If we are really honest haven't we, at some point, disagreed with Jesus, asking why he doesn't do what we want? Why won't he see the world our way? It all seems so clear to us.

- If he can cast out demons and silence the man in the synagogue, surely he could silence the voices that drive us crazy.
- He can heal Peter's mother-in-law, why not those we love?
- If he can calm the sea surely he can calm the storms in our world, we have lots of them raging concurrently right now.
- If he can feed 5000 with a few fish and a few pieces of bread why does so much of the world go to bed hungry?

Those are our rebukes.

Have you asked any questions like that recently?

When Jesus does not act the way we want, we rebuke.

Rebuke seems appropriate when you are hearing something you don't want to hear, perhaps you've never heard, and likely never want to hear again.

Rebuke is perhaps necessary when you have not been adequately prepared for that which is to come.

Rebuke is often the only response when faced with the impossible. The incomprehensible.

Just a few verses before today's gospel reading, Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter's response is really

a public confession, “You are the Christ (the Messiah).” Peter’s confession sets up our text this morning.

Jesus is the one for whom the prophets spoke, the one for whom Israel has waited, the one who was supposed to restore God’s people. Peter is right, and yet he also does not understand.

Later, as Jesus begins to teach about all that is ahead for him, and after Peter’s rebuke, Jesus rebukes Peter in public. There is no softer way to say what is to come. Sometimes his words challenge us and shock us. Maybe we are not so different from Peter.

Jesus invites people to engage in something bigger than themselves. To take on the powers of the empire and define oneself in the name of Christ. It’s a call to discipleship. A life following him is the best way. This life may be hard and full of uncomfortable moments, but this way leads to resurrection – to new life.

Jesus’ words are hard and his way extreme. Surely God didn’t covenant with God’s people to bring them out of Egypt into the promised land only to say, “Now let it all go.” The Messiah is supposed to offer security, protection, and put Israel back on top. Peter is learning, faith in Jesus is not about the elimination of risks, the preservation of life and the ability to control.

Just as Jesus asks his disciples to risk it all, so to he is asking this of us. Risk. Abandon. The ways that lead to separation from God, relinquish the control.

That’s what Jesus is doing and he’s inviting those who follow him to do nothing less.

How is your Lenten Journey coming along two weeks in? I am struggling on all three points. Risking. Separation from God. Relinquishing control.

In recent weeks, through the various images of our divisive climate, in a community that struggles with trust of people in perceived authority, I have been thinking a lot about integrity. We've seen recent examples of leaders who make us question integrity.

What does integrity look like right now?

What does it mean to lead with integrity?

How are people checking themselves on this?

It's complicated. In the time of pandemic.

People are finding their way. People inevitably make decisions about mutually shared interests or what is based on self-preservation.

Families are making decisions on what is best. Schools are weighing the science and the emotional toll of children and families and trying to figure it out. Churches are making difficult decisions about what is best for the worshipping community.

It's incredibly complicated.

But it's Jesus who invites us into something bigger than ourselves.

Jesus is reminding us that our whole life belongs to God. That we are not in control, God is. Our life is not about us. There is great freedom in knowing that at the end of the day, the role of the Savior of the world has already been cast.

Jesus is pointing the disciples (and us) to the larger story of God's work in the world. Along the way we can see how –

- Jesus chose to give in a world that takes,
- to love in a world that hates,
- to heal in a world that injures,
- to give life in a world that kills.

He offers mercy when others seek vengeance,
forgiveness when others condemn,
and compassion when others are indifferent.

He trusts God's abundance when others say there is not enough.
With each choice he denies himself and shows how God is present.

At some point those kind of choices will catch the attention of and offend those who live and profit by power and control. It will all lead to betrayal, arrest, crucifixion and death. And yet, God acts and death doesn't have the final word, the political powers of the day are overthrown.

The late Rachel Held Evans, offers a most hopeful, inspired answer out of the conviction that our lives find their meaning in the biggest stories we can imagine. To me this speaks about integrity.

She says, "If the biggest story we can imagine, is about God's loving and redemptive work in the world, then our lives will be shaped by that epic. If the biggest story is something else, like nationalism, or 'follow your bliss' or 'he who dies with most toys wins,' then our lives will be shaped by those narratives instead."

God's loving and redemptive work in the world rests with us, as we take our place in the most wonderful, mysterious, important story we can imagine. As we walk in the stories this Lenten season may we uncover again the pattern of our lives that lead us back to love. If we follow this amazing story, our story together, we might leave this place as witnesses and instruments of God's love, **for love's sake.**

Thanks be to God.