



Pastor Ken's Sermon

Second Sunday in Lent

Mark 8:27-38

February 28, 2021

“MIRROR, MIRROR, ON THE WALL...WHO IS JESUS AFTER ALL?”

“*Alice in Wonderland*” is a story of make-believe. In her elaborate daydream Alice imagines things that cannot be and yet, become – real. Talking cards and cats and caterpillars and mushrooms that if eaten make you both shrink and grow. It’s author, Lewis Carroll wrote a sequel, which he called “*Alice Through the Looking Glass*.” In it, readers must learn not to engage their imagination, but to think, as it were, “inside out.” Mr. Carroll created a mirror-image world. Everything is a reflection, so if you are going to get somewhere, you must learn to move away from it – in what to your mind seems the opposite direction.

It’s the kind of thing that can tire and frustrate the mind – and if you don’t believe me, try recalling the last time you looked in a mirror and tried to trim your hair!! In our story from Mark today, that is the sort of thing that Jesus is asking his disciples to do – think inside-out, to move away from a cherished idea about their rabbi that they might come closer to the truth about Him. Peter thinks he’s got it – proclaiming Jesus to be Messiah – another word for God’s anointed king.

In Matthew’s version of this event, Jesus commends Peter for his answer – “*blessed are you*” he said. Not so in Mark. Our Lord makes no such commendation, though neither does he dispute Peter’s description – why else swear everyone to silence about it? Given the lack of an objection, one might think Peter shot a telling smile and the boys could now gather up other Galilean faithful and head to Jerusalem to take it by force. What was it after all Jesus not only had been preaching for three years but teaching his men to pray for, but his kingdom come?

Peter’s cherished idea turns out to be the mirror-opposite of Jesus’ kingdom, in which His coronation would be on a cross and followers would assume their positions in it by taking up their own. Defeat would be victory, humility the emblem of strength and charity the way to genuine treasure. This decidedly “inside-out” kingdom makes no sense unless the question “Who do you say Jesus is?” is answered. Initially, Jesus asks another one – “*Who do people say I am*.” Nice discussion starter – a question that can remain safely in the realm of the theoretical.

To a 3rd person question Jesus gets all sorts of good 3rd person responses – Elijah, John the Baptist, one of the prophets or maybe God’s latest one. You could be wrong and still contribute to the discussion. But the latter – “*who do you say I am*” affords no such luxury – it is intensely personal, and the most important question you’ll ever answer. Jesus’ rebuke of Peter happens because the dear old rock answered correctly but for all the wrong reasons.

Suffering and dying didn't fit Peter's conception of a respectable kingdom, even if it lined up all to hauntingly with how others who called Israel to repentance in the past had fared - the prophets of old. We can excuse Peter and the others for not wishing to entertain any of those thoughts.

Who wants to fail in life? Who wants to see your team lose, your cause fizzle, your beliefs trampled?

Jesus said this is what was going to happen...but that he would be raised to life again, the inside out world of the kingdom in which life as it was meant to be lived only begins when we die. Which could only be done one way – by the power of God. Having his teaching mocked and his life taken only to have it restored meant then, that Jesus was someone and represented something that God was not only pleased but wanted to see more of.

Today, among the many of world's people, Jesus is a remote figure. For secularists to hear a Christian say we love Jesus sounds like we love, regularly speak to and count as one of our family someone from Pluto. Nonsense in other words. Pluto can only be seen with the most powerful telescope and then barely. Jesus died 2000 years ago. Remote indeed!

Yet Jesus is also a very familiar figure. Remember when the aforementioned secularists and one of their play-writes made him a Superstar in the 1960's! Today, His words which convey things of eternal significance can be found on the same billboards that Walmart and Amazon use. He is talked about over the same social media we use to give status updates and upload vacation pictures. It would not be untruthful to say that even the faithful occasionally lose him under the familiarity of our rituals and traditions. The news so supremely good which we call our New Testament sometimes doesn't seem like it has anything new to offer. We preachers are not immune to that either! *'Who do we say He is'*...with the great hymnwriter Thomas Dorsey, can we say of Him, or better to Him *"precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, help me stand, I am tired, I am weak, I am worn?"*

Yes, we call him our Savior...but at times do we not also think of him a bit of a robber – taking away independence and pleasures not to mention our Sunday mornings? A poet by the name of Francis Thompson, in a work of his entitled *"The Hound of Heaven"* wrote (of Jesus) *"For, though I knew his love who followed, yet I was sore adread, lest having Him I must have naught instead."* Is that who we say He is? And yet, as theologian Cornelius Plantinga wrote in his book *"Beyond Doubt"*, in a thoroughly "inside-out" observation, says Jesus is a robber of sorts – and why, perhaps, Peter was so perturbed.

For if Jesus is King of the World and not merely a messiah of a nation, he does indeed, as Dr. Plantinga writes, come to plunder us of every false hope we cling to and every deadly comfort we turn to. He means to rob us in other words, of life itself, insofar as we've defined life for ourselves. Does our lesson today not strongly suggest such a life may even be satanic? In its place, Jesus wants to give you a purposeful life, under a foundation of grace and truth. But to have it we must relinquish – the "inside-out" part of the Christian life that is so hard to grasp and even harder to entrust ourselves too. We need to walk away from what we think it good in order to really arrive at what is supremely good.

Jesus said; *"whoever wants to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for me will save it."* That's quite a storyline – but it's no fairy tale – it's the gospel. And blessed are they who choose to live it. AMEN