

## Second Sunday in Lent

### 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."*

I think Peter is one of the most compelling people presented to us in the gospel stories. Peter has a big heart that he wears on his sleeve, he wants deeply to do the right thing, and you can tell he is completely committed to the vision of Jesus. But Peter is also a man who is afraid. I'm not sure exactly what he is afraid of, but it certainly seems like he is especially afraid of loss. We don't know if he experienced some trauma in his past, or some deep loss, but Peter clearly wants to cling tightly to the things and people he loves.

We saw this a couple of weeks ago when we heard the story of the Transfiguration when Peter and James and John ascended a mountain with Jesus and encountered in him in his full glory alongside Moses and Elijah, the great prophets of old. There Peter wanted to pitch tents and stay forever in that rarified state. We will see it again when Jesus is arrested, and Peter denies even knowing Jesus three times because he is fearful for his life. And in this reading this week, we see Peter again full of fear. He is afraid for Jesus, a little at least, but he is probably mostly afraid for himself. After all, he's given up a lot to follow Jesus; and what Jesus is telling them here, that he's going to die, very soon... well that might make all of Peter's sacrifices count for nothing at all.

In First Timothy it is written "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil," but in my experience most evil is borne of fear. We crave money because we think it will give us security, but it is fear that drives us to put our desire for safety and security in false promises. Fear is the true root of evil in this world.

Which is what Jesus is trying to tell us when he says, "For those who want to save their life will lose it." The only hope for our eternal survival is through the love of God. The way-of-Jesus offers us freedom from fear, if only we're willing to follow. The old way of following the Law had become, in Jesus' time, just another false promise. In fact, it had become a way of promoting fear because one could never be sure it was followed perfectly.

So, when Peter rebukes Jesus he is expressing his fear of losing everything, even his own life. And that is why Jesus calls him a satan, a tempter. Since Jesus is as human as the rest of us, he

understands fear and some part of him surely wanted to take the easy way out. But Jesus is also divine, and this allowed him perfect faith to trust God, even in the face of the knowledge of his certain death.

And since in baptism, we are grafted into the body of Christ, some measure of his perfect faith is available to us through the Holy Spirit. We too can rebuke our fears and our anxieties and put our trust in God and live our lives as though we were already fully living in the heavenly kingdom. We can choose hope, we can chose to serve others, we can choose love. Even when the false promises cry out and threaten to deafen us to Christ's calling, we can still choose love.