

February 11, 2024 Sermon

Based on Mark 8:27-9:8

One of the funniest sitcom's from the 1980's was the show, The Golden Girls. The show was about 4 older women who shared a home in Miami, Florida. The straight talker in the group was Dorothy's elderly mother, Sophia. She would often try to teach the group something meaningful, by saying something like, "Picture it. . . Sicily, 1942. A young girl and a young man walking down a dirt road carrying a picnic basket. . . ." This may not be the place to say any more of her stories as they would get a bit off color. However, picture it. . . Jesus and his disciples walking on a dirt road on their way to Caesarea. It's likely hot, their feet are dusty. This trip would have taken several days and people would have been joining and leaving the group throughout. Got the picture? Jesus took advantage of this time to ask his disciples an important question: Who do people say that the Son of Man is? His disciples said John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets. He then asked, who do you say I am? Peter spoke for the group and told Jesus, "You are the Messiah", but then Jesus told them not to tell anyone.

During this time, Jesus is starting to bridge his public ministry in Galilee to his private journey in Jerusalem which will end with his arrest, torture, and crucifixion. He is also shifting from public demonstrations of authority to instruction of the disciples. However, when he describes what is in his future, Peter takes Jesus aside and says, No, God forbid this. This can't happen to you. Jesus says "Get behind me Satan, as you have your sights set on worldly things and not on divine things".

He then quickly turns to the crowd and tells them something that has always been hard for me to understand and probably accept. In order to follow Christ, we have to deny ourselves, take up the cross and follow Him. “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”. In this segment, Jesus was telling the people, the non-Christians, what discipleship was, but saying it in front of his disciples, who He had hoped had figured it out, but they hadn’t yet. The disciples knew who Jesus was, the Messiah, but they were still just so focused on his humanness, his works and deeds in the world. They could not see his divine work as God.

We probably all think of it this way, but especially for me having a career in the health field, we don’t say. . . We will save your life so you can lose it!!! What does that mean. It means that we have to lose our “false” selves in this world in order to truly follow God. It’s hard to follow God if we are focusing too much on things in this world. . . our money, our possessions, our idols we worship here on earth. What or who are we putting in front of God? Are we aware of the things we put in front of God? Are we just like the disciples of Jesus in that, the human, earthly pull is so hard, so we have trouble clinging to that too much.

The story in Mark prior to our narrative reading today is about the blind man who was brought to Jesus. Jesus placed his hands on him, but when Jesus asked if he could see, the man replied, “I can see people, but they look like trees walking.” Jesus then laid his hands on him again and this time, the man could see clearly. What things in your life are you kind of seeing, but maybe not clearly. Is it easier, to either not see something or to see just part of it, versus doing the extra work, the extra laying on of hands, to see something more clearly.

I have had some situations in the past few years where I was misreading the clues given to me or just had trouble seeing anything else. One of those situations was trying to decide if I should retire. There was a strong pull of things like, “how many years should I work”, “I’m good at my job, what will they do without me”! (ha ha). I had often said my nursing career and caring for others was my calling. . .the reason why I was here. Who would I be if I wasn’t nurse practitioner, Virg? Yet, I had this tremendous pull that felt like God telling me it was time to go down another path. It was hard to see that path, however, as I was holding onto the other things in my own narrative and I wasn’t seeing things clearly. Once, I released the thoughts and images of my “false” or purely human self and focused on God, my eyes were opened and I was able to see the issue with a clearer, God like image.

The Bible is a very good book, but even as Christians we can sometimes pick and choose passages that we then use to try and support our earthly or false selves. Many of these are from the Old Testament, but there are many of the New Testament as well. Matthew 22:39-40 gives the command to us succinctly. The Pharisees asked Jesus what the most important commandment in the law of Moses was and Jesus replied, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: Love your neighbor as yourself. The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments”. Love God and love others. God put our souls in our heavenly bodies for this purpose. When we get to Heaven, God isn’t going to check our voting record, our savings account balance, or the number of followers we have on our social media accounts. He is going to look at how well we followed these commandments.

Next, our narrative reading goes on to the transfiguration of Jesus. Six days earlier, Peter had proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah, but was rebuked when he denied Jesus’s mission to suffer and die for sinners. The disciples learned that Jesus could not be their idol, but they must be willing to accept

God's plan of redemption and Jesus committing to it. They must also self deny, be willing to bear their own crosses, and to follow in his footsteps. Now, picture it. . .Mount Tabor, 40 days before Jesus's passion, Jesus is dazzling in this bright light on the mountain. Moses and Elijah are next to him. In this dazzling moment, Peter again loses sight of the big picture. He wants to hold onto this glorious scene, and suggests that they all just camp out together. If the story had ended in a campground with all of them just talking while roasting marshmallows, it would have prevented the rest of Jesus' life and ministry. We can look at Moses and Elijah for the future of heaven in that we don't die, but live with God forever. This is the point where human nature meets God; the bridge between heaven and earth. Eventually, the disciples will realize that though Jesus's humiliation and death on the cross were painful and frightening, they can take comfort knowing that glory is promised to them.

As you journey through Lent, ask yourself, "Who do I say that Jesus is? Is he a religious fanatic or a prophet? Is he a miracle worker or a social activist? Is he the Messiah, who took the punishment for me so that I could be made whole? How we answer these questions is important, because our discipleship journey goes only as far as who Jesus is to us.

So close your eyes and picture it,. . .yourself, it's February 14-March 31, Lent 2024, you're coming to church on the designated evenings and on Sunday's, you are connecting with the Word from the Bible or the Lenten devotional at home. How are you seeing Jesus? What role does He have in your life? What hope does He provide you? Is His light shining as brightly in your life as it did when He was transfigured. Rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

Amen