

February 12, 2017

“Risky Business (Let Your Light Shine)”

Mark 8:27-37

The Rev. Lynn P. Lampman

Introduction to the Scripture Reading

This passage deals with three ideas:

- Jesus as the Messiah,
- Jesus says he will die and be raised in three days,
- He tells his disciples to take up their cross and follow him.

You will remember that when we began this series on risky business in the Gospel of Mark six weeks ago, we said that Mark was the first Gospel written around 66-70 C.E./A.D.

And in Mark, it is important to note that Jesus never declared himself to be the Messiah or the Son of God. Yet, other do, but they never declare him the Messiah in public. In private, to Jesus by the Holy Spirit at his baptism, here in our passage for today, when Peter declares Jesus the Messiah, in the transfiguration story in the next chapter of Mark (9), and at his trial by the authorities.

Jesus titles were not part of Jesus’ teachings and message in Mark.

Then, according to Mark, when the disciples did recognize him as the Messiah, he tells them to be quiet, don’t tell anyone. Why? Could it be because Jesus message in our earliest gospel is not about believing a set of statements about him. Rather, his message is about the coming of the kingdom/the reign of God, conveyed in stories about exorcisms, teaching, healing, parables, the sea, feeding, conflict, and “the way”.

Peter upon being asked with the others, is the first to say Jesus is the Messiah. Now, the word Messiah and Christ have the same definition. Messiah means “the Anointed One” in Hebrew and Christ means “the Anointed One” in Greek.

The interesting things to note here is there was not a unanimous of what the Messiah would be like, it was fluid in first century Judaism, different groups had different expectations. But all how longed for the Messiah agreed to two things.

1. He would be anointed by the Spirit of God.
2. He would be the decisive figure of Israel’s history. The Messiah would usher in God’s future, which God intended for Israel and the world. The Messiah would be more than “just” another prophet.

So then, Peter’s confession means: you are the one we have been waiting for – the Messiah, the anointed one, the promised one of God.

Immediately after Peter affirms, “You are the Messiah, Jesus speaks for the first time about his fate and destiny in Jerusalem; and tells the disciples that he will be killed by the authorities and raised by God. This is the first of three times Jesus will tell them the same thing in this central section of the gospel of Mark. Here in chapter 8, then in 9, and then in chapter 10. He goes on to explain to them what that meant.

Immediately, Peter puts up an objection. Jesus takes him aside. Yes, Peter has just called Jesus the Messiah, but does not yet see or accept where this is leading – to the cross and then some. Christians are familiar with the claim that Jesus’ death was of great significance. For close to a thousand years, the most

common form of Christianity has spoken of his death as a dying for the sins of the world. Jesus death has been understood as payment or compensation for human sinfulness: his crucifixion paid the price for our sins so that we can be forgiven. This understanding is known as “substitutionary atonement” – a concept that was first fully developed by a bishop and theologian named Anselm of Canterbury in 1097.

But this concept is not in Mark or in early Christianity. Note that the three warnings of Jesus’ fate in Jerusalem do not say, “I must go to Jerusalem in order to die for the sins of the world.” Rather, they say that Jesus will be killed by the authorities who ruled his world. The notion that Jesus died in our place as a substitutionary sacrifice for sin required by God; is foreign to Mark to the other gospel as well.

Only one verse in Mark is sometimes cited to support the notion of substitutionary atonement. It occurs at the end of the third repetition of the killed by the authorities raised by God message. In chapter 10 verse 45 it reads, “For the Son of Humanity came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Yet, it is important to note here, that the word “ransom” belongs to the metaphor of liberation from slavery: for a “ransom” is the price paid to liberate slaves. Jesus death is seen as a means of liberation for others.

In the gospel “Jerusalem” has a two-fold significance: First, literal martyrdom or metaphorically regarding the spiritual and psychological transformation at the center of following Jesus – dying to an old identity and being born into a new one, dying to an old way of being and being born into a new way of being. Following Jesus “on the way” that leads to Jerusalem also has a second meaning. Consider the language of being “killed”. Jesus

didn't just die in Jerusalem – he was executed. Jerusalem is the place of confrontation with the powers that ruled Jesus' world. The gospel of the kingdom of God is not simply about personal transformation, essential as that is. It is also about saying "No" to the domination system that killed Jesus. This is the political meaning of following Jesus. Taking up your cross means standing against the status quo in the name of Jesus' passion for the kingdom/the reign of God – what life would be like on earth if God was the king/the supreme leader, and the rulers of this world were not.

All of this is quite different from the idea that Jesus' death was a substitutionary sacrifice for sin – the notion means that Jesus died for us so that we don't have to. For Mark, following Jesus to Jerusalem means participating in his death and resurrection. Rather, than substitutionary atonement Mark speaks of participatory atonement. We are called not to simply believe that Jesus has done it for us, but to participate in his passion. We are asked and challenged to take the risk that comes with being messengers who both speak and live out Jesus message of love, healing, and hope. May God help us to do nothing less! Amen and Amen.