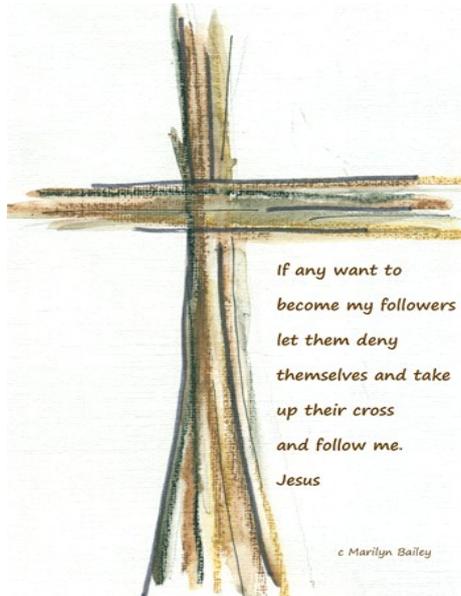


Worship Material for Sunday 28th February, 2021

The Second Sunday of Lent – Year B



COLLECT:

Almighty God,
you show to those who are in error
the light of your truth,
that they may return to the way of righteousness:
grant to all those who are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion,
that they may reject those things that are contrary to their profession,
and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same;
through our Lord Jesus Christ,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever

COLLECT GENERAL FOR LENT:

Almighty and everlasting God,
you hate nothing that you have made
and forgive the sins of all those who are penitent:
create and make in us new and contrite hearts
that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness,
may receive from you, the God of all mercy,
perfect remission and forgiveness;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.

First Reading: Genesis 17.1-7,15-16

A reading from the book of Genesis

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. 2:And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.' 3:Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, 4:'As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. 5:No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. 6: I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. 7: I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after

you. 15:God said to Abraham, 'As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. 16:I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.'

Second Reading : Romans 4.13-25

A reading from the letter to the Romans

¹³The promise that Abraham would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

¹⁶For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, ¹⁷as it is written, 'I have made you the father of many nations'). Abraham believed in the presence of the God who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. ¹⁸Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become 'the father of many nations,' according to what was said, 'So numerous shall your descendants be.' ¹⁹He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. ²⁰No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. ²²Therefore his faith 'was reckoned to him as righteousness.' ²³Now the words, 'it was reckoned to him,' were written not for his sake alone, ²⁴but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in God who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, ²⁵who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

***This is the word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.***



Gospel Reading: Mark 8.31-38

***Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to MARK
Glory to you, O Lord.***

³¹Jesus 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. ³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But 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.'

³⁴He 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. ³⁵For 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. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸Those 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.'

***This is the Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, O Christ.***

Parish Prayer:

Lord, we need your eyes, give us a living faith. Lord, we need your heart, a love to withstand any test. Lord, we need the breath of God, give us your hope, that we may bear witness to the world, and to those among whom we live.

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Reflection 1:



The Gospel passage starts just after, at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus has asked his disciples a decisive question, "Who do you say that I am?". This episode is central and vital in Mark's Gospel because it begins his extended Passion narrative.

On behalf of all, Peter answers without hesitating, "You are the Messiah." Finally, it seems like everything is clear. Jesus is the Messiah sent by God and the disciples are following him to collaborate with him.

Jesus knows that's not how it is. They haven't yet learned something very important. It's easy to confess Jesus in words, but they still don't know what it means to follow him closely, sharing his plan and his fate. Mark says that Jesus "began to teach them." It isn't just another teaching, but something fundamental that the disciples will have to assimilate little by little.

From the start he speaks to them "completely openly". He doesn't want to hide anything from them. They have to know that suffering will always accompany him in his task of opening the way to the Kingdom of God. In the end, he will be condemned by the religious leaders and die through violent execution. Only when he resurrects, will it be seen that God is with him.

Peter rebels against what he's hearing. His reaction is incredible. He takes Jesus aside with him to "rebuke him." He had been the first to confess him as the Messiah. Now he's the first to

reject him. He wants to make Jesus understand that what he's saying is absurd. He isn't willing for him to follow this path. Jesus has to change this way of thinking because to be faithful we have to accept Jesus on his terms and not on ours.

Jesus reacts with unknown harshness. Nowhere else does he speak in such a way to an individual and it is a very public humiliation for Peter.

Suddenly he sees in Peter the features of Satan, the tempter, the inner voice, in the desert who seeks to separate people from the will of God. Satan means the adversary - not a demonic figure but anyone who opposes the will of God. Satan is a legal figure, an adversary in court. He turns to face the disciples and literally rebukes Peter with these words: "Get behind me, Satan!" -- go back to your place as a disciple. Stop tempting me. "You are thinking as men do, not as God does."

Then he calls the people and his disciples to listen well to his words. He will repeat them on several occasions. They are never to forget them. "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." Not exactly a great recruiting slogan that.

There are those today who proclaim that because they call themselves Christian they will somehow be spared suffering and illness. I have heard it said recently by a member of one body that they would not catch Covid-19 because God would protect them. That's not how it works. God himself in humanity was not spared suffering, and neither shall we be. It is how we face it that matters. Those who make idle boasts about God's favour are guilty of the temptation of putting God to the test - something Jesus decisively rejected in the wilderness.

Following Jesus isn't an obligation. It's a free decision for each one. But we have to take Jesus seriously. Facile confessions aren't enough. If we want to follow him in his exciting endeavour of building a more humane, worthy, and joyful world, we have to be willing to do two things.

First, renounce projects and plans that are contrary to the Kingdom of God. Second, accept the suffering that may come to us for following Jesus and identifying with his cause.

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Reflection 2 from SALT, a resource website

Big Picture:

1) In one of his classic teachings, the Buddha tells his disciples that understanding his instruction is like picking up a poisonous snake in the wild; it's all too easy to get bitten. In fact, he says, it's entirely possible to misinterpret his teaching to mean the *opposite* of what he actually intends - not 10 degrees to the left, or 20 degrees to the right, but 180 degrees off-target, the reverse of what he means. If you pick up a snake in the middle of its body, it can easily turn and bite — but if you get a forked stick and pin the snake behind its head, and then pick up the snake just behind its jaws, you'll be safe and sound. So it is with understanding my teaching, says the Buddha. It's not simply a matter of hearing the teaching, or being able to recite it — it's about holding it in the right way. To shift the metaphor: a scalpel can be used to save life or to end it. Ideas are dangerous, and can do significant damage if they aren't handled with skill and care.

2) This week in Mark, we come face to face with arguably the most difficult, challenging, and dangerous of Jesus' teachings: the idea that Jesus must suffer, die, and rise again, and that anyone who seeks to be his disciple must "deny themselves and take up their cross and follow

me" (8:34). The disciples are perplexed, Peter is offended, and Jesus takes them to task for misunderstanding him — and so we should be cautious about whether or not we understand him ourselves. There are snakes slithering in the grass here, and if the disciples are any indication, mistaken conclusions abound. In Mark, this is the first of three cycles in which (a) Jesus predicts his passion, (b) the disciples misunderstand, and (c) Jesus responds with a discourse on the true nature of discipleship (see [Mark 9:31-50](#) and [10:33-45](#) for the other two cycles).

3) This difficult teaching is immediately followed by the Transfiguration, which can be read as a kind of radiant reassurance for the bewildered disciples. And it's immediately preceded by the story of Jesus and Peter discussing who Jesus really is — and as we'll see below, that exchange is so deeply connected with today's passage that we recommend including it in the reading this week (that is, beginning at 8:27 instead of 8:31).

4) Since the Season of Lent leads to the cross and the empty tomb, this passage orients us to the road ahead. As we follow the lectionary, we'll read selections from John's Gospel over the next three weeks, returning to Mark on Palm Sunday.

5) This week's passage from Genesis is part of the story of God's covenant with Abraham and Sarah. Last week we heard the story of God's covenant with all living creatures in the story of Noah; here God covenants with the couple whose descendants will become the people of Israel, the particular group through whom "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" ([Gen 12:3](#)). A universal covenant is followed by a particular one, though it's still for the sake of the whole. Both covenants are called "everlasting" and in that sense are not subject to human failing or forfeiture: God establishes these covenants and promises they will never end. A powerful way of thinking about all of this is that it's not so much that God makes separate covenants here and there, but rather that God's covenantal relationship with creation unfolds in salvation history, like a single flower blooming over time, with later covenants (in Moses' day, in Jesus' day, as prophesied by Jeremiah, and so on) helping to reveal the depth and beauty of what was there all along.

Scripture:

1) Beginning with verse 27: Answering Jesus' famous question, "Who do you say that I am?", Peter declares, "You are the Messiah" (literally "the Anointed" or "the Christ") - which is the very word Mark uses to open his Gospel ([Mark 1:1](#)). And so it would appear that Peter — for once — gets it right! But alas, not so fast. As if sensing that Peter might have something quite different in mind, Jesus describes the true nature of messiahship — and Peter, confounded and anxious, takes him aside and rebukes him. In first-century Palestine, a prevailing view was that the Messiah would come and lead a military triumph, routing the Roman occupiers and restoring the Davidic monarchy, and Peter may well have been thinking along similar lines. At any rate, he has no stomach for the notion that the Messiah would be disgraced by suffering and death. But Jesus understands messiahship in terms similar to those outlined in Isaiah's "Suffering Servant," a mysterious figure who will deliver God's people not with swords and chariots, but rather through his own affliction and suffering on behalf of others, through "pouring himself out unto death" ([Isaiah 53:12](#)) — and ultimately through his eventual exaltation (compare the resonant themes in [Philippians 2:6-11](#)). Evocative and enigmatic, these ideas have been debated for centuries, by Jews and Christians alike.

2) Jesus draws the strongest possible contrast between Peter's ideas of messiahship and his own, identifying the former with Satan's temptation and a stark opposition to "divine things." As if his frustration with his disciples drives him to issue a public announcement of his mission, he calls "the crowd with his disciples" to gather around and listen: anyone who wants to follow him,

he declares, will have to "deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." A deep physics is at work here, with the very act of seeking to save one's life causing the seeker to lose it, while the one who seeks to give up one's life "for my sake, and the sake of the gospel, will save it." In the overall flow of the narrative, the implication here is that for Jesus, Peter's view of messiahship amounts to a form of self-centered grasping, whereas Jesus has come for the 180-degree-opposite reason: to live for God and neighbor in love; to give, not grasp.

3) Perhaps the most accessible and familiar expression of this "deep physics" is the end of the famous prayer attributed to St. Francis (he didn't write it, but much of it is in keeping with his spirit): "let me not seek so much / to be consoled as to console, / to be understood as to understand, / to be loved as to love, / for it is in giving that we receive, / it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, / and it is in dying that we are raised to eternal life."

4) It's worth noting that Jesus does not say, "*Seek out a cross* and then follow me," but rather "*take up your cross* and follow me." This is no invitation to court, intensify, or prolong suffering (after all, to do so would violate what Mark calls the "first commandment," to love God and love your neighbor as yourself — which obviously involves loving and respecting yourself!). Rather, the assumptions here are (a) that you already have suffering in your life, and (b) that following Jesus will entail some suffering. The invitation, then, is not to seek out but rather to "take up" that suffering, to seize the role of active protagonist in the drama, not the role of a passive victim; and then to follow Jesus along the way that leads to health, liberation, restoration, and new life.

5) The story of God's covenant with Abraham is both miraculous (given Abram and Sarai's old age) and delightful (Abram cannot help but laugh at the news of a new baby, as does Sarah in the next chapter; "Isaac" means "he laughed"). But perhaps what's most distinctive about this passage is the way the covenant is marked by signs, both physically and socially. Circumcision is one such sign, of course (circumcision was not uncommon in the ancient world, though it was typically administered at the onset of puberty; the shift to infancy suggests that in the ancient Hebrew imagination, God's covenant covered the whole span of life). But another covenantal sign here is receiving a new name: God renames Abram as "Abraham," evoking the Hebrew words for "father" (*'ab*) and "multitude" (*hamon*), thus signalling his new identity as "father of a multitude." And likewise, Sarah's new name ("princess") anticipates the royalty who will number among her descendents (Genesis 17:6). The deep poetry here is that participation in God's covenant involves substantive, tangible signs of commitment and community.

Takeaways:

1) These are challenging, enigmatic, generative ideas. They're meant to be wrestled with for a lifetime; they don't reduce to a single formula or slogan. For millennia, Christians have been debating how best to understand the cross and the empty tomb, and no ecumenical church council has ever been called to settle the question. This openness itself is instructive! We are dealing here with great mysteries, and multiple ways of understanding them are both possible and welcome.

2) Why are the cross and the empty tomb — Good Friday and Easter Sunday — at the heart of Christian faith? Is it because Jesus thereby shows us love and mercy even unto death? Is it because Jesus, by rising from the dead, defeats death-dealing forces once and for all? Is it because Jesus, by "becoming a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13), cancels all debts and so sets us free? Is it because Jesus subversively transforms some of the worst things in the world (the Roman cross and betrayal among friends) into some of the best things in the world (the Tree of Life and forgiveness among enemies) — thus effectively proclaiming that God will redeem

everything in the end? Is it because the cross declares God's compassionate solidarity with all those who suffer? Is it, because, to borrow a phrase from the poet Mary Oliver, this story will break our hearts open, never to close to the rest of the world? Is it all of these things and more?

3) That said, there are plenty of snakes in the grass here, plenty of ways to get bitten. One is to understand messiahship in terms of military conquest and self-centered gain. Another is the myth of redemptive violence, the idea that suffering itself can save. Yet another is the notion that we are called to pursue suffering, the better to participate in Jesus' passion. All three of these ideas are diametrically opposed to the Gospel, and should be called out as such. True messiahship is about compassion, not conquest. Suffering doesn't save; rather, God saves, and one of the things God saves us from is our violent ways, including our destructive ideas about the redemptive powers of violence and suffering. Likewise, Jesus doesn't call us to pursue or prolong suffering; rather, he calls us to end or alleviate suffering whenever possible, and when suffering can't be avoided, to "take it up" and follow Jesus, healer and liberator, into God's dawning new world where "mourning and crying and pain will be no more" (Revelation 21:4; Isaiah 25:8).

4) Remember, Jesus puts forward this difficult teaching in direct counterpoint to the conventional view of the Messiah as a military conqueror. In effect, "take up your cross" is meant as a contrast to "*vanquish your enemies*," whether those enemies are military, personal, or otherwise; "deny yourself" is meant as a contrast to "*arrogate power for yourself!*" In other words, Jesus contends that the heart of the conventional view of messiahship is self-centered attempt to seize advantage over others — and he will have none of it. In Mark, Jesus' path is a way of humility, healing, and liberation, not grasping, dominance, and destruction.

5) Following Jesus is nonetheless challenging, of course; in some ways it is only more so. Letting go of illusions and opening up to new life is always challenging. Unfurling our self-centered lives into lives of love, and thereby recovering our true selves as the loving creatures we are made to be, is always challenging. Giving instead of grasping, generosity instead of vengeance, is always challenging. In short, living in covenant with God pushes us to grow. Accordingly, as we follow Jesus this Lent (and always), we may well feel growing pains in our bodies and relationships — and in the end, we may be changed by the covenantal struggle. We may receive a new identity, a new role, or even a new name. With Abraham and Sarah, we may catch ourselves laughing with incredulous delight at the wonders God has done.

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Prayers: from 'Prayers of Life' by the Abbe Michel Quoist

Lord, here is your Cross!

Your Cross! As if it were your cross!

*You had no cross and you came to get ours,
and all through your life,
and along the way to Calvary,
you took upon you,
one by one,
the sins of the world.*

*You have to go forward,
And bend,
And suffer.
The Cross must be carried.*

Lord,
you walk on silently;

is it true, then,
that there is a time
for speaking and a time for silence?

Is it true
that there is a time for struggling
and another for the silent bearing of our sins
and the sins of the world?

Lord,
I would rather fight the Cross;
to bear it is hard.

The more I progress,
and the more I see the evil in the world,
the heavier is the Cross on my shoulders.

Lord,
help me to understand
that the most generous
deed is nothing
unless it is also silently redemptive.

And since you want for me this long way of the Cross,

At the dawning of each day, help me to set forth.

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Lectio Divina – Bible Study

LECTIO (Reading):

Wild rumours are flying around about Jesus' real identity. He asks the disciples who people think he is. Most people liken Jesus to Old Testament prophets, particularly Elijah. Others think he might even be John the Baptist.

Jesus then asks the disciples who they think he is. Peter says he is the Messiah, even though he doesn't fully understand this. At this point Jesus only wants the disciples to know his true identity, so he commands them not to tell anyone else.

Jesus then gives them an insight into how his mission on earth will end. He tells them clearly that he will suffer and die but three days later will rise from the dead. This doesn't fit with Peter's idea of a Messiah so he tells Jesus off!

Jesus firmly rejects Peter's suggestion and makes it clear that Satan is using Peter.

This is human thinking not God's. Peter clearly has a lot more to learn about Jesus. Jesus then explains to the crowd just what it means to be one of his disciples.

He uses the image of carrying a cross. This would have created a vivid and fearful picture in the minds of his listeners. Many would have seen a condemned man staggering beaten and bleeding through the streets to face this humiliating and painful death.

Jesus' words are an alert for the first disciples. If you want to follow me be prepared; it will involve suffering. Some disciples did experience physical crucifixion. Some today still give their lives for the sake of the gospel. For the rest of us, being prepared to lay down our lives to submit completely to God's will is a daily challenge for every disciple.

MEDITATIO (Meditation):

- Consider who you believe Jesus is. How complete is your understanding? Can we, like Peter, sometimes be guilty of thinking we know better than Jesus?
- Consider why you follow Jesus. Does it help to remember these reasons when following him involves sacrifice or suffering in some way?

■ Jesus speaks of 'carrying your cross daily' and 'losing your life for Jesus and the gospel'. What does this mean for you? Remember Jesus sends us the Holy Spirit to help us live the Christian life.

ORATIO (Prayer):

Psalm 116 is a great shout of joy for deliverance. The psalmist says 'I kept on believing' even though he was crushed and afraid (verses 10-11). Think about your relationship with God; can you use these verses to praise him now?

CONTEMPLATIO (Contemplation):

Faith will spill over into self-sacrificing and practical love for others.

Kyrie Confession

We confess to you our selfishness and lack of love:

fill us with your Spirit.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

We confess to you our fear and failure in sharing our faith:

fill us with your Spirit.

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

We confess to you our stubbornness and lack of trust:

fill us with your Spirit.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

