



My Grind this week was based on this presentation

## **Mark 8:31-38**

### **Lent 2B**

Immediately after Peter declares that Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus begins to teach the disciples that he will “undergo great suffering.”

He will be rejected by the religious leaders of the day. He will be killed. After three days he will rise again. Mark tells us, “He said all this quite openly.” A stark contrast to his command to the disciples “not to tell anyone about him” just verses before. The very ones closest to Jesus must hold in tension a painful truth: Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of Man must suffer, be rejected, be killed and only then rise again. The world will witness the latter, only they will know the former until the third day and beyond. Such truth is hard to handle. Peter’s rejection of Jesus’ dark declaration is understandable.

I remember being the bearer of tragic news. A terrible car accident had resulted in the death. My first call was that another call me when they got

home. Instead he pulled over on the side of the road and called. I dreaded making the call. I resolved to be as straightforward as possible, fearing I'd lose my nerve if I didn't just say the words "She is dead". Another car crossed the freeway, the crash was awful, and she is dead, burned to death. The words tumbled out and the person who loved them deeply, said: "No. No they are not dead. No, no, no!" I knew the harsh truth and yet I had an urge to say in the face of his resolute denial, "Maybe I am wrong, maybe they are alive." I wanted to be relieved of the responsibility of this truth. But I couldn't be. I had been entrusted with a brutal truth that had to be shared openly; anything less would have been cruel. Sometimes, when we are close to people, we are given the sacred trust of holding and sharing horrific truths. We are then called to remain with those left to live in a new, never before imagined reality.

The disciples know the truth: Jesus is the Messiah. The Son of Man will suffer greatly, be rejected, killed and then three days later rise again. Not everyone is entrusted with this truth, not yet, only those closest to Jesus. Peter cries: "No. No you don't. No, no, no!" But Jesus refuses to give into Peter's need to soften the painful reality.

Jesus then turns to the crowd and with his disciples tells 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." I try to imagine the crowd's response. I try to imagine my own response, as if this were the first time I'd heard Jesus' proclamation. I would like to think I would have been all in — yes, Jesus I will follow you to the cross, lose my life for you, do whatever is required for the sake of your gospel, no matter the cost. I'd like to think that now, too. I know better.

My words and my actions and my inactions all scream, "No, no, no!" The truth is too difficult. I can't stay with Jesus now that I know what he must endure and what is required of me as his friend and follower. I recently heard a person lament that one of the many losses of a major illness she endured was the loss of close friends. As she underwent painful procedures and treatments, her life hanging in the balance, they disappeared, unable to face the truth that she might die, unable to face the

truth that if she, their peer, might die, they might, too. They rebuked her and said: “No! No, no, no!”

Jesus says plainly what he must undergo and says plainly what is required of his followers. He knows many won’t be able to handle the reality of suffering, death and loss. Many will rebuke him, turn away and abandon him. **Many still do.**

That is why Jesus says these things quite openly: suffering, rejection, death, cross bearing, life losing — these are the truths that accompany the Son of Man. On the third day Jesus will rise again. Those who lose their lives for the sake of the gospel will save them; this is the truth that comes with following Christ, too. Can we hold these realities in tension? Are we able to bear the suffering long enough to witness resurrection?

My son called me to tell me he had gone to an Ash Wednesday service. (I think he wanted full credit.) He went to a service that was not the Tradition he grew up in and he recounted the differences. The one that struck him the most was that at the imposition of ashes he was not told, “You are dust and to dust you shall return.” Instead he heard, “Repent, and turn to the gospel.” He relayed a sense of disappointment. He was seeking the definitive declaration of his finitude. He went to hear a truth, a brutal truth, told plainly and openly and anything less seemed disingenuous.

We need to hear openly – from Jesus and in church – the truth of suffering, rejection and death. That reality surrounds us everywhere else, doesn’t it? Jesus entrusts us with the truth of his Messiahship, the cross and resurrection. We must hear the whole truth if we are to stay the course and follow Jesus. We must hear the whole truth if we are to stay with those who suffer here and now. We must hear the whole truth if we are to lose our lives for the sake of the gospel.

Time and time again I want to scream, “No! No, no, no!” in the face of yet another school shooting, and another friend’s cancer diagnosis, and the scourge of addiction, poverty and war. I want to turn aside, run away and pretend that these brutal realities are fake news. It is only in rare moments of faithful courage, when I hear Jesus speak the whole truth: The Son of

man must undergo great suffering, be rejected, killed and rise on the third day. If you want to follow me, take up your cross, lose your life with me, for me and be saved.

We are dust and to dust we shall return, but we sing alleluia as we go to the grave because we know the truth — the whole brutal, beautiful truth of our Messiah, the Son of Man, the one we follow to the cross, the resurrected one who comes to us despite our rebukes, denials and abandonment. Yes. Yes, yes, yes. By the way, no alleluia's in Lent.

This week:

1. Have you ever experienced the abandonment of friends during a difficult season? Were there people who remained with you no matter what you were facing? What was that like?
2. Why do you think Jesus tells the disciples not to share that he is the Messiah, but says openly that he will suffer and be killed?
3. Imagine hearing Jesus' declaration that you must lose your life for him and the sake of the gospel as if for the first time. What is your reaction? What does it mean to lose your life for Jesus and for the sake of the gospel?
4. What does it mean to "take up your cross"? Are you taking up your cross?
5. How do we gain the world and forfeit our lives?



6. As Lent progresses, how are your Lenten practices going? What are you learning about yourself? Your faith? God?

Terry Hershey [above] is a favorite of mine also. I ID with him because we are both wired weird. KatieD+