

Desperate Measure Part 2: The Desire for Control

Scriptures: Psalm 19, Mark 8:27-38

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Laura Smith Conrad

Focus Scripture: Mark 8:27-38

²⁷ Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" ²⁸ And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

²⁹ He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." ³⁰ And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

³¹ Then he began to teach them 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. ³² He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ 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."

³⁴ 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.

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

Proclamation of the Word

Today's sermon Desperate Measures Part 2 is about the desire for control. Naturally, human beings want to control and manage things whether those things are possessions or information. If you want to watch this behavior, the best example of the human "Control Freak" is the toddler, the two year old.

Toddler's Creed

If I want it, it's mine.

If I gave it to you and changed my mind, it's mine.

If I can take it away from you, it's mine.

If I had it a little while ago, it's mine.

If it is mine, it will never belong to anyone else, no matter what.

If we are building something together, all the pieces are mine.

If it looks like mine, it's mine.

(anonymous, shared with me by Ben Sill, grandfather)

It all belongs to me. I want to be in charge. It's mine.

In today's Scripture, Jesus speaks to Peter, the disciples, a crowd, and to us through the voice of the Holy Spirit. He tells us of his passion, his journey to the cross where he must suffer, die and then be raised on the third day. On this side of Easter, we sometimes forget how we got there. Crucifixion is one of the most horrible forms of death imagined by humans. And Jesus went there. Peter desires a different message from Jesus. He wants to be in charge.

In these few weeks we are looking at the desperate measures. Last week Jesus heals two people the Syro-phoenician woman's daughter and the man who was deaf. Jesus overcomes prejudice to bring mercy and healing. He is willing to listen to the desires of a desperate mother. He teaches us that he came not only to save the children of Israel but to save Gentiles or non Jews, most of us. He

then opens the ears of the deaf man, so that those who witness the healing must go and confess their awe and amazement at Jesus. In both cases, the desire for healing is addressed by Jesus.

In today's gospel lesson, Jesus deals with Peter's desire to control and deny Jesus' role as suffering messiah. A need to control is also very human. So many of us relate to Peter in his humanity. Peter on one hand gets it right when he says that Jesus is "Messiah" or "Christos". These words mean, "anointed one"- chosen by God. The title Messiah or *Christos* in Greek is based on the Jewish expectation of a victorious king to save them from those who have conquered their nation and who occupy their land now, the Romans. The Jews expected triumph, not a crucified Jesus charged as the worst kind of criminal according to the government of the time...the charge of treason. It is a difficult message. The Son of Man must suffer, be killed, and be raised after three days. This is the first time the disciples are told of what suffering Jesus must undergo. No wonder Peter is confused. He rebukes Jesus- he confronts Jesus head on.

Peter is not unlike the toddler. It all belongs to me. I want to be in charge. It's mine. In fact, Peter is somewhat like Jesus' agent, his publicist, his first mate.

Peter does not understand this idea of a suffering messiah. Yes, the prophets spoke of a suffering servant in Isaiah. In chapters 52 and 53 Isaiah prophesies about the suffering servant who

He will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted (52:13)

But Scripture goes on to say,

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by humans, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. (53:2-3)

He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows...he was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities...he was led like a lamb to the slaughter..." (various verses chapter 53)

Peter was corrected (8:32) because, in answering Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?" he got the job title right. Messiah! But not the job description. Suffering and service. He takes Jesus by the elbow and pulls him off to the side. Sometimes handlers, agents, publicists, and personal assistants have to take their "Talent" aside and get his or her mind right.

Let's not be too tough on Peter. Because he was operating out of his religious upbringing, and it had two job descriptions for Messiah, the Hebrew term meaning "anointed," the Greek for which is Christos. They competed with each other and sometimes overlapped. One was that Messiah would be a descendant of David and would come to restore and vindicate God's people and then rule over a blessed era of earthly peace. The other was that he would be an otherworldly being who would return at the end of this age to pass judgment on enemies and vindicate the righteous (Son of Man). There was no notion of connecting the Suffering Servant of Isaiah with the Messiah they expected. But this is what Jesus did. (Alyce M. Mckenzie, Preaching the Sermon in Lectionary Homiletics, Proper 19, September, 2009)

When Jesus rebukes Peter in return for Peter's rebuke, He says, "Get behind me, Satan." That is a loaded statement. Satan, you remember, is famous for the 40 days of temptation in the wilderness. Satan tries to tempt Jesus with power, possessions, and celebrity. Jesus resists for he knows that the way to power is through weakness and that in dying to self we find life. Jesus must face the cross in order to save humanity from itself.

In a culture where we avoid death at all cost, the cross is scandalous and foolish.

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

¹⁸For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."

²⁰Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. ²²For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, ²³but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

God chooses a cross to show forth his suffering love, wisdom, and true strength.

Jesus is teaching Peter that he is the leader. Jesus will lead the way. Peter cannot be in charge or control God's methods. Peter cannot hold onto Jesus and say "you're mine." Peter must relinquish. He must let go of Jesus. And Peter, the disciples and those of us in the crowd there and here, must take up a cross and follow him. In losing our selves we are found. In dying we find life.

Mark knows that only those who follow Jesus to the cross will recognize who he is. If we stop before Calvary, we misunderstand Jesus. We will mistake him for just another miracle worker, or another exorcist, or a wise and compelling teacher. If the disciples proclaim Jesus the Messiah without the cross, they will proclaim a false messiah, for Jesus' true identity can be known only at the cross. There, even an unenlightened Roman soldier will recognize him: "Truly this was the Son of God."

(Why Follow a Crucified Christ? (Mk. 8:27-38) by Kenneth L. Carder in the Christian Century, Aug. 27-Sept. 3, 1997, p.753, copyright by the Christian Century Foundation.

We can think of those who literally gave their lives for their faith, the martyrs and the saints, who were burned at a cross or stepped in front of tanks to save others and to promote justice. But for many of us here today, taking up a cross and following is making little decisions each day in order to serve God and to love our neighbors. It is the person who pauses to say grace before meals or the family who comes to church in their soccer clothes, making an effort to worship on the Lord's Day. It is the nurse who does her job well. It is the young person who seeks to follow God in the face of pressures to do otherwise.

Fred Craddock puts it this way...

We think giving our all to the Lord is like taking a \$1,000 bill and laying it on the table- "Here's my life, Lord. I'm giving it all."

But the reality for most of us is that he sends us to the bank and has us cash in the \$1,000 for quarters. We go through life putting out \$.25 here and \$.50 there...

Usually, giving our life to Christ isn't glorious. It's done in all those little acts of love, \$.25 at a time.

(Fred Craddock, cited in *Leadership* (Fall 1984), 47.)

In the Toddler's Creed the resounding phrase is "It's Mine."

The maturing Christian grows into faith and learns to say to God instead, "I'm Yours."

Take up your cross and follow. Get behind Jesus. He will lead you into his life, death, and resurrection, life everlasting.

It's a choice we make everyday, saying to God "I'm yours."