

Mark 8:31-38

31 Then Jesus began to teach his disciples: “The Human One must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and the legal experts, and be killed, and then, after three days, rise from the dead.” **32** He said this plainly. But Peter took hold of Jesus and, scolding him, began to correct him. **33** Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, then sternly corrected Peter: “Get behind me, Satan. You are not thinking God’s thoughts but human thoughts.”

34 After calling the crowd together with his disciples, Jesus said to them, “All who want to come after me must say no to themselves, take up their cross, and follow me. **35** All who want to save their lives will lose them. But all who lose their lives because of me and because of the good news will save them. **36** Why would people gain the whole world but lose their lives? **37** What will people give in exchange for their lives? **38** Whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this unfaithful and sinful generation, the Human One will be ashamed of that person when he comes in the Father’s glory with the holy angels.”

Sermon - The Gospel in God’s Rebuke

“There’s not enough hours in the day for me to be the person I want to be.” One of our college students at Capital, Moriah, said this at Bible study one night, and it pierced my soul. The demands of life, already laid on this young woman, threatened the vibrance, the wonder, the God-given intelligence of this woman. You see, not only is she taking a full credit load and working; she’s also been invited to present at four different conferences because of her excellent academic work. That’s a painful truth to come to realize for anyone, and especially emerging adults: that we’re limited creatures, and that our bodily limitations, our exhaustion,

the very nature of living life in sequence, will determine the kind of life that we can live. Moriah shared this insight with our Bible study, and through her, we all saw the truth and it corrected something in us.

That's what we see today in the Gospel. The fullness of the Gospel tells the truth and corrects our misconceptions. Moriah helped us see the gospel in God's rebuke.

Let's clarify a few things first. The word Gospel simply means "good news," so we can use it in a few different ways. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the cosmic scale good news that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us, that we're saved by God's grace, and through our faith we see that this is a gift of God, not earned by our works but offered out of God's abundant gifts. That's the Gospel with a capital G that we talk about in our Christian, and particularly Lutheran, faith.

Out of that "capital G" Gospel - the OG Gospel - comes lots of "little g" gospels, pieces of good news that expose to us the truth

of ourselves and our world. They're not the message of salvation itself - that is Capital G stuff - but instead they're particular ways we can learn to live out our salvation here today. It's that gospel with a lowercase g that we're talking about today, the gospel we find in God's rebuke.

What does the gospel do? Three things: 1) Tells us the truth. 2) Corrects us. 3) Invites into abundant life. The gospel tells us the truth, corrects us, and invites us into abundant life.

How do we know the Gospel tells us the truth? Jesus "said this plainly," per the report of the narrator of Mark's Gospel. In other words, there's no doubt, no ambiguity about Jesus's meaning. It's clearly, and obviously the truth. What's something that's so obviously true that it would be absurd to contradict? Water is wet. Ice is cold. The Ohio State Buckeyes are objectively the best college football program. When things are true, to fight their truth, to assert the opposite, puts us in a preposterous

position of saying ice is warm, that water is dry, that there's a reason to root for someone other than the Scarlet and Grey. Even in the face of our resistance, the gospel tells the truth.

That means, then, that the Gospel tells us the truth, even when it's painful for us to admit that truth. That's why Peter actively resists Jesus's prophecy about the human one's suffering, rejection, murder, and resurrection. It's painful to imagine that our concepts of God are wrong, especially when we're hearing that they're wrong from God's mouth. It's hard enough when we do our taxes, realize we owe something, discover we don't understand simple math. It's hard enough when something breaks in our house, we're forced to call an expert, and realize we're not capable of truly handling every problem that comes our way. When God confronts us with that truth, God corrects our misconceptions of the world. Jesus corrected Peter's misunderstanding of the Messiah. Peter likely expected a military hero would we take the

throne in Jerusalem by force, so the concept of suffering at the hands of Rome's representatives and Jerusalem's authorities just didn't match his hopes. The gospel truth corrected him.

What's most odd here isn't that Peter resisted. It's that Peter resisted in the full knowledge of the resurrection! It's clearly and obviously the truth that Peter hears, and more than that, it is clearly ultimately good news, but he still tries to correct Jesus because it's not the good news that Peter expects. How often do we scold God, even after the Lord's told us that plain, absolute truth? Like a child who knows that they're wrong, that they're caught in the lie, but refuses to admit their mistake?

Correction is uncomfortable, but it is also lifegiving. Pointing out the evil in our lives, the times when we've aligned our priorities with satanic ends, opens our eyes to how we might be more godlike as well. Pointing out our trajectory of death opens us up to the potential for abundant life that God continually offers to us.

What does it look like to take up the cross in Urbana, Ohio? In this self-identified “city of peace,” what does it look like to follow Jesus to what seems like a gruesome end, and yet, through that, find glorious, vibrant, life and light? Moriah was right. There’s not enough time in the day to be the people we want to be. But, in the footsteps of Jesus, through the cross and into life abundant, we may become the people God desires us to be. Losing our lives means taking up Christ’s life and living like was never possible before.

One of the ways we can do this is to align our priorities with Jesus. One of my mentors used to say, “you can tell a person’s commitment level to the Gospel by looking at two things: their calendar and their wallet.” To me, that sounds pretty resonant with Jesus today: “all who lose their lives because of me and because of the good news will save them.” Simply stated, how we organize our time and how we commit our funds reveal the priorities that

we've chosen. That's especially true this wake of continued school shootings, the rise of suicide among adolescents, and the plague of loneliness that has struck our hyper-connected culture. Let's be clear: the answer here isn't posting a meme about getting prayer back in schools, as though that would solve all the problems we have. The truth is, prayer never left schools. We just stopped forcing people to pray our prayers and allowed them to pray in ways that fit their faith. What this is about, is thinking God's thoughts rather than human thoughts.

Here's what we have to admit: We clearly can't solve these issues on our own. Every time we try, we put people more in danger of harm, whether at their own hands or through the actions of others. We need to learn to pursue God's safety over our own violence-laden, so-called security. We need to learn to love others beyond social media. We need to value the humanity of people who don't agree with our politics, and see the humans that

are dehumanized by our politics. We need to get beyond trying to save our lives and start losing them in the love of Jesus that resurrects even the most seemingly hopeless cause, because no one is beyond the love of God. But how will they know, unless someone takes the time to tell them?

The call to the church isn't to be the apostles, to deny like Peter, to scatter like the others, to try to save ourselves. The call is to take up our cross and follow Jesus through death and into life.