



March 12, 2006

Preaching: Pastor Rich French

Mark 8: 31-38

“Facing Facts and Freaking Out”

Prayer: *Lord, my prayer is that the words I use and the way they are heard will glorify you.*

I found out recently that I have a great-grandfather who fought for the confederacy during the civil war. Suddenly I felt like I understood myself a little more clearly. Suddenly I was able to explain why I often feel so rebellious. In that same moment I felt ashamed that I have not been more rebellious, more radical, more willing to take a stand for what I feel is important. While I was able to find some comfort for myself when I remembered that the confederates had lost that war, still somewhere deep inside me, I felt something was different.

I was reminded of how important it was to be excited about following Jesus. So you are probably wondering what this has to do with this morning's sermon. Well let's go back to the Mark passage and see if I can help you to see the connection.

It says, “31He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. 32He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. “**Get behind me, Satan!**” he said. “**You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.**” 34Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “**If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 35For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. 36 What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? 37 Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? 38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.**”

This is some pretty radical reading; I can only imagine what it would have been like to be there.

Let's try to breakdown the situation.

1. Jesus tells those gathered around him that he will suffer, be rejected, killed, and that he will rise again.
2. Peter rebukes Jesus. By the way the definition of rebuke is to "express one's disapproval sternly"
3. Jesus rebukes Peter's rebuke.

While we don't know what Peter said I could assure you the major difference is that Jesus uses very strong language for his rebuke...

"Get behind me Satan."

You could almost say that Jesus freaked out.

Now I feel I can say this about Jesus because He and I have this in common. You see I tend to freak out too. You probably do too.

We all freak out, for some of us it is personal problems, or maybe money, the interesting thing here is that it is Jesus who is doing the freaking.

This is somewhat out of character for Jesus. We really don't see this as a Lamb of God type thing. He is supposed to be in control.

We won't see it again until he turns over the tables of the moneychangers. See for Him sometimes it was money too!

So because of the way he reacts to Peter we can tell that it is a pretty important topic.

Just what is the topic here? Just why is it that Jesus would be so freaked out?

In verse 32a, which is found only in Mark, we begin to see the answer. It says "and he was speaking the word plainly."

When Peter takes Jesus aside and "rebukes" him, it is not because Peter misunderstands Jesus' words, but because he does understand them, and he doesn't like them.

To quote that great theologian Mark Twain: "Many people are bothered by those passages in Scripture which they cannot understand; but as for me, I always noticed that the passages in Scripture which trouble me most are those which I do understand."

I suggest that Peter was trying to get in the way of the facts, the work of the kingdom. He was acting in a way that would be best for him not for God!

So how can we avoid that mistake? How can we make sure that we are acting for God and not for ourselves?

This is where the next part of the scripture passage comes into play. **"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 35 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it."**

Billy Graham poses the question this way: "When Jesus said, 'if you are going to follow me, you have to take up a cross,' it was the same as saying, 'Come and bring your electric chair with you. Take up the gas chamber and follow me.' He did not have a beautiful gold cross in mind - the cross on a church steeple or on the front of your Bible.

Jesus had in mind a place of execution." "Take up his cross . . ." The members of the early church knew exactly what Jesus was saying here. They had seen his example. He literally took up a cross and bore it to Calvary. He had willingly chosen to subjugate his will to the will of the Father. He did what he had to do, and he did it not for his own gain, but for others.

For you and me.

No concept has been as corrupted in the common vernacular as this one: bearing a cross. People say, "I have arthritis, but that's just my cross to bear." "I have a lazy husband, but that's just my cross to bear." You and I know such problems have nothing--absolutely zero--to do with Jesus' words.

When you bear Jesus' cross, you are saying something entirely different. You are saying that you are willing to serve God, you are willing to serve others, you are willing to put aside selfish concerns and focus your attention on God's Kingdom. If that costs you money, if you have to give up some of your precious time, if you have to get out of your comfort zone, then that is just what you will have to do. When you bear a cross, God's will comes first in your life.

Let me give you a modern day illustration of a man whom I believe both understood and exemplified Jesus' words on self-denial, cross-bearing and following Him. Some

of you may be familiar with the name Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He was a Lutheran pastor who lived in Germany during the Second World War.

Convinced that it was his Christian duty to work within his own country for the defeat of Adolf Hitler, Bonhoeffer became a part of an underground resistance movement. Unfortunately, his involvement was discovered and he was sent to a prison camp. He never returned. In 1945, at the age of 39, he was executed by hanging, just as World War II was ending.

We may not share in all of his views, but by any and all definitions he is a 20th century Christian martyr. By the time of his death he had already done quite a bit of writing.

Perhaps his best-known work (still available and popular today) is entitled, "The Cost of Discipleship." In it he offers many thought provoking statements on the Christian life.

One of the phrases he uses over and over again (and something he accuses many modern Christians of buying into) is the concept of "cheap grace." Listen to how he defines it: "Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our church. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ."

I am convinced that a major percentage of being an effective Christian is a willingness to use the name Jesus outside the church walls, and not being freaked out by the power that His name invokes. I am convinced that this is what keeps so many of us from being radical for the kingdom of God.

We don't want to face the fact that we will freak people out by calling on the power of Jesus name, we want to claim the power for ourselves. We want to rebuke the Lord and act as though we are the primary reason for the good things that God is doing through us.

According to that great font of wisdom, Yogi Berra, "If you come to a fork in the road, take it."

Mark 8 is a kind of theological fork in the road. This chapter is the hinge of Mark's gospel. Not only is this the exact middle of Mark in terms of chapters and verses, it is also theologically the center point at which the ministry of Jesus takes a decisive turn toward the cross.

Jesus seems to know what he is doing and also where he is going (or, better said, where he must go whether he wants to go that direction or not).

For the disciples, however, Mark 8 does present a kind of fork in the road. And like Yogi Berra, as they look at the fork in the road, they want to take it. They want it both ways. They want to stick with Jesus and be his followers while at the same time insisting that Jesus follow them down the path they want to take. We want it both ways too.

What does it mean for me, a happy person with a good life, to deny myself and take up a cross?

I have no final answer, but I did gain some insight from Fred Craddock, a well-known preacher. In a sermon on this text he spoke about commitment and sacrifice and grand gestures. He told this story: "A wealthy man went to his priest with a check for fifty thousand dollars made out to the church. He handed the check to the priest and the priest looked at it. It was a lot of money! Then the priest handed it back and said, "Go cash it in. Cash it in for quarters or dollar bills and spend fifty cents or a dollar at a time doing the Lord's work." The man exclaimed, "But that will take the rest of my life!" "That's right!" answered the priest. That is the point!"

Mother Teresa heard of a family whose nine members were starving to death. She hurriedly obtained some rice and went to the family, giving them enough rice to prepare a meal. But the woman she gave the rice to, divided it into two piles, she placed one in a bag and started to leave. Mother Teresa asked where she was going. The woman said she was going to visit another family who she knew was starving also. This woman faced the fact and she freaked out. She took action.

What are the facts we need to face, what are the sins we commit.

Have we been labeling people as "us" or "them", "we" or "they"?

Do we foster abuse?

Are we guilty of neglect?

Are we doing anything to relieve hunger?

Are we standing up against oppression?

What are the radical ways we can freak out? How can we startle the world while we are living the Word?

If we have money and that is easy to give, then we have to freak out some other way. If we have time and that is what we always offer, then we need some other way to carry our cross.

If we are ready to rebuke someone else then we need to hear the voice of our savior rebuking us.

An Admirer once asked Leonard Bernstein, celebrated orchestra conductor, what was the hardest instrument to play? He replied without hesitation: "Second fiddle. I can

always get plenty of first violinists, but to find one who plays second violin with as much enthusiasm or second French horn or second flute, now that's a problem. And yet if no one plays second, we have no harmony."

Like Bernstein in search of harmony, I think that God is calling us to be in harmony with Him, and the fact is that if we are in harmony with God, most of the world will see us as freaking out. If we are calling ourselves Christians then we are all related to someone who lived as a rebel.

Let's face the facts.

We need to start freaking out in favor of God.