

SERMON: "WHO KNOWS BEST?"

SCRIPTURE: MARK 8:31-38

DATE: SEPTEMBER 13, 2015

Mark 8:31-38 (NIV)

³¹ He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. ³² He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

³³ But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

³⁴ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? ³⁷ Or what can anyone give in exchange for their 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 them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

In the sixties there was a popular Broadway ballad entitled "If I Ruled The World". It captured the idealism of that decade.

Remember these lyrics?

"If I ruled the world, every day would be the first day of spring
Every heart would have a new song to sing
And we'd sing of the joy every morning would bring.

Every head would be held up high
There'd be sunshine in everyone's sky
If the day ever dawned when I ruled the world"
(Cyril Ornadel/Leslie Bricusse)

I'm sure we've all had moments when we thought that we could look after the world better than it's currently being run.

Just in our own lives, how often have we thought or said, "if only" things could be this way or that.
"If only" we had been given the opportunity that went to someone else.
"If only" things had worked out the way we had planned.

We all have regrets.
We all have unfulfilled wishes and dreams.

Things could be so much better if what we had wanted had actually happened.

And yet, if the truth be known, not all our ideas for the world or for ourselves would work out the way we desire.

I remember as a child watching "Father Knows Best" on TV. It seemed quite reasonable to suppose that the father of the 1950's was the fount of all knowledge and wisdom. I'm sure the fathers back then thought so! But as a father, myself, during the last three decades, I will readily admit that the compact answers to life's problems that Robert Young used don't seem very valid today.

A lot of times, I suspect, we are like an opposition party in politics, which has the answers to every complex problem of society

but the answers don't stand up when our party takes power. When the power shifts, the new opposition party suddenly has all the answers.

Life can be very complex and our solutions don't always recognize that truth.

The Apostle Peter discovered that in our lesson this morning. This is Mark's take on the end of a scene we looked at a few weeks ago from Matthew's Gospel. This morning we're concentrating on the second half of the scene.

Things were going very well for Peter. He had just answered the million dollar question. Jesus had asked the disciples who they thought He was.

It was Peter who got it right.

"You are the Christ", he declared.

Now it was out in the open.

Now the disciples had heard the connection affirmed.

Our lesson begins immediately after Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ---as the long awaited Messiah.

Verse 31 tells us that Jesus began to teach the disciples. They had been together for quite some time but they had barely scratched the surface so far. Now it was time to dig deeper.

The lesson Jesus now taught must have stunned them and left them gasping in despair. Jesus, who had just been identified as the

One who was to come and save Israel, told them that He would be rejected and killed.

He also declared that He would rise again after three days, but I'm sure they didn't hear that part at the time. All they could think about was His upcoming rejection and death.

The Messiah wasn't supposed to die.

The Messiah was supposed to liberate and restore the people of Israel.

And so we come to Peter. Peter went from hero to goat in a matter of seconds. From confessing Jesus as the Christ, Peter responded to this shock in a dramatic and very human way.

Our translation says that Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke Him. Other translations point out that the "being taken aside" had a physical element to it. The Greek word can be translated "cornered or collared."

Peter collared Jesus.

William Barclay translates it as "Peter caught hold of Him".

Eugene Peterson, in the *Message*, has it as "Peter grabbed Him in protest".

Peter was absolutely adamant that what Jesus predicted should not happen. Peter didn't want it to happen. He didn't want to hear about it happening. It didn't fit in with the way Peter thought things should work out.

How on earth could Jesus die? It made no sense.

What could it possibly accomplish?

Jesus responded that Peter was thinking as a man, not as God thinks.

That was Peter's problem.

That's our problem too.

However, it's not something we can do much about.

As much as we would love to be God, we aren't. In truth we don't think like God. We don't foresee things as God does. We can't grasp the complexity of life as God can.

And yet we think we can. We try our best to come up with all the answers.

Because we are human, we are very much like Peter.

Peter had to learn that acknowledging Jesus as the Christ meant letting Jesus be Christ---letting Jesus define what Christ means, what Christ will do.

We need to let Christ be Christ---let God be God---even when we don't understand---even when we rail at the circumstances around us.

It stretches our trust and challenges our faith.

It could be the most difficult thing we do as Christians.

We are so much like Peter.

It's been said that: "Experience is always the hardest teacher, because you take the test before you learn your lesson."

We need trust and faith in God to get us through the learning process. But trust and faith aren't things that many people can be brought to by logical argument.

Ultimately it's a matter of the heart, not the head.

It's about our willingness and openness to accept and live with the unknown and unexplainable.

It's about our willingness and openness to live with the misty greys of life rather than having to have things in crystal clear black and white.

When it comes to struggling and trust, Cornelius Plantinga Jr. has some words of wisdom:

"We do not refer each other to the Cross of Christ to explain evil. It is not as if in pondering Calvary we will at last understand throat cancer. We rather lift our eyes to the cross, whence comes our help, in order to see that God shares our lot and can therefore be trusted."

God does not stand apart from the suffering of the world. Jesus and the Cross show us God came to stand with us in the midst of it.

When we face the unexplainable, God doesn't rush to tell us why. Sometimes we find out reasons by looking back. Often we simply live through the circumstances as best we can.

But, as we live through things, we have the assurance that we are not by ourselves.

God stands with us. God's presence is always there. God makes Godself known in the love and care of others. God's strength is at our disposal even if God's answers are not always plentiful.

We trust and have faith through the relationship of love and care we have with God that is so much a part of being a Christian.

We also trust and have faith because, ultimately, we can know that God is sovereign. God is in control. God sees everything clearly!

The path that Jesus lovingly took to the Cross wasn't the way Peter would have had it. If we had been there I'm sure we would have shared in Peter's sense of despair. But the way things look to us and the way they are to God don't always line up. Our understanding of the whole picture can be so very limited.

The story is told of a king who had a close friend with whom he grew up. The friend had a habit of looking at every situation that ever occurred in his life (positive or negative) and remarking, "This is good!"

One day the king and his friend were out on a hunting expedition. The friend would load and prepare the guns for the king. The friend had apparently done something wrong in preparing one of the guns, for after taking the gun from his friend, the king fired it and his thumb was blown off.

Examining the situation, the friend remarked as usual, "This is good!"

To which the exasperated and bleeding king replied, "No, this is not good!" and proceeded to send his friend to jail.

About a year later, the king was hunting in an area that he should have known to stay clear of. Cannibals captured him and took him to their village. They stacked some wood, set up a stake and bound him to

the stake. As they came near to set fire to the wood, they noticed that the king was missing a thumb. Being superstitious, they never ate anyone who was less than whole.

So, untying the king, they sent him on his way.

As he returned home, the king was reminded of the event that had taken his thumb and felt remorse for his treatment of his friend. He went immediately to the jail to speak with his friend.

"You were right," the king said, "it was good that my thumb was blown off." And he proceeded to tell the friend all that had just happened.

"And so I am very sorry for sending you to jail for so long. It was bad for me to do this."

"No," his friend replied, "This is good!"

"What do you mean, 'This is good'? How could it be good that I sent my friend to jail for a year?"

"Because", the friend said, "if I had not been in jail, I would have been with you and I have both my thumbs."

Who knows best? Who knows best?

It wasn't Robert Young. Someone was writing his scripts for him.

Who knows best?

It isn't us, either. We don't really have the ability to write all the scripts for everyone in the world.

Who knows best?

Our head might wonder sometimes but our heart says:

"The Lord God Almighty---that's who knows best!

(1684)