

2020 NL2 WK Mark 8 and 9
20-02-23 7th Sunday after Epiphany/Transfiguration

God's beloved people, grace and peace to you in the name of our crucified and risen Savior, Jesus Christ.....Amen.....

I was at home sick for over a week and began binge watching "The West Wing." It's a show from the early 2000s about the presidency which I never watched then, but appreciate very much today.

At any rate, there's a scene where a senator who is very conservative religiously is trying to push through some legislation. And he asks Toby, one of the president's speech writers, "Do you believe the bible is God's words?" To which Toby responds, "Yes...., but I don't think either one of us is smart enough to know what they all mean."

That's how I often feel when reading scripture. There's so much in there! And today is a case in point.

We begin with Jesus asking some questions...., Peter answering...., Jesus teaching...., Peter rebuking and being rebuked...., and then the whole group moving on...., some of them going up the mountain where Jesus is real shiny, Moses and Elijah show up, and God speaks out of the cloud....

That about cover it??// And it's all clear, right??// The words are right there on the page. Peter heard the words and knew the answer, but had no idea what he was saying!!

Not many of us would have known what to do in either if those situations either, though with the advantage of hindsight, we'd all like to THINK that we'd do better.

Still, we do seem to get some mixed messages from the Divine one today: *who do you say that I am?* – You're the Messiah – Well, Don't tell anyone about it! – - *This is my son, listen to him.* – But don't tell anyone what you've seen until after he's risen from the dead. Okay, What??

One time he says speak to me, twice he says not to say anything, and God tells them to listen. There's a lot going on in the reading today.

Jesus asked his disciples, "*who do you say that I am?*" Peter takes the bait and gives the right answer, "You're the Messiah." And that changes everything!!

No longer is Jesus simply a miracle worker and one who can do cool things with bread and storms. Jesus is the Messiah – the anointed one, the Christ. "*Who do you say that I am?*" is a primary question of theology because as soon as we open our mouths to answer, we are doing theology – we're saying "God words," or our spouting our thoughts on God.

Our answer to "*who do you say that I am?*" takes our whole lives to shape because our answer isn't simply a confession of faith, it's a proclamation of our

witness to Jesus. The faith that we have in Jesus is what allows us to open our mouths at all in answer to the question.

Who do we say Jesus is? Jesus is the one who has saved me and all that exists.

Who do I say Jesus is? Jesus is the one who has called you and me... and in whose name we seek to serve in the community and world.

Who do I say Jesus is? Jesus is the one who didn't come to collect power, but in his very being showed intrinsic power, and shared it while he was working miracles of healing and calming storms and doing cool things with bread.

Peter got the answer to the question right – “Messiah,” BUT he messed up in the execution. And that's how it goes with speaking about and listening to Jesus. Anything after we say “I believe...” gets murky. What we do..., how we do it..., why we do it ALL IN THE NAME OF FAITH, gets our own grubby fingerprints all over Jesus and the faith that he strikes in our hearts.

We get our own biases, hopes, fears, observations and expectations in on it, and we hold up those things that validate our own strong belief while ignoring or vilifying that which we think doesn't strengthen or agree with our own thought. These are “*setting our minds on human things, not divine.*” A lot of who we say Jesus is will look an awful lot like ourselves and in my arrogance, I like to think that I follow Jesus the best. While others are misguided and wrong.

In this..., I am Peter..., arrogantly thinking that I have the freedom to rebuke Jesus. Messiahs don't act like this!!

Therein lies the very reason that Jesus MUST die. Not because God demands a sacrifice..., and not for any other elaborate reason..., but because of the arrogance of human sin. “Human sin is real, and it is only healed by God's act of graciousness”by NOT coming down off that cross, to suffer, die and be raised again – for you. Because no answer that you can give is “right” enough to save you from the power of sin that lurks until death. Only the Messiah saves in his gracious act of love for you.

This is the way of the kingdom – God's kingdom is one where all people will have a hand in the drama. It's not just God's hand reaching down out of the clouds in a Monty Python-esque way to smite people.

In Jesus God will tell it like it is. God will show his love for all people by hanging out with those who need healing, those who need instruction, those who have been pushed out of the community. And while those people will love Jesus in the moment of grace and transformation, they will also be ones who join the crowds and hurl the insults and call for Jesus' death.

Even Peter, of “*Get behind me Satan*” fame, - will deny Jesus – One of Jesus' closest friends. But Elijah and Moses show up, and God speaks with finality

to listen to this very one whom Peter identified as the Messiah... Not the Messiah we wanted..., but the Messiah we need...:

The Messiah who **gives** it all, not **takes** it all.

The Messiah who **loves** us all, not one who upholds and reinforces human divisions.

The Messiah who **shows** us the love..., mercy..., grace and glory of God.

That while God is like us and walked the earth, God is soooooo not like us – and THAT is the good and saving thing.... THAT makes all the difference.

Because of what Jesus has done for you, “We take on the crosses of the world, the suffering of the world, not the path of escape... but of engagement!”

We listen to God by listening to the cry of our neighbor.... That in serving them, we serve the one who suffered, died, and rose for us.

Amen.....