

Mark 8:31-38

One thing we can say about Peter—he sure had guts. He rebuked Jesus to His face! Teachers rebuke students who misbehave. Parents rebuke unruly children. Peter rebuked God! What was wrong with that man? Did he really think he knew better than Jesus did? Yes, he did. And so do we. How often haven't you and I questioned God's course of action—allowing a sickness to come, an accident, a death? Do we really think we can run our life better than God? Yes, we do. For one thing, we would eliminate suffering. If you were in charge of your own life, would you allow yourself to catch the flu and be sick for a week? Would you allow yourself to suffer in any way? Not for a minute. Rather, we would ensure that we had a healthy body and mind. If we ran our own life, we would eliminate hearing loss, poor eyesight, arthritis. We may not make ourselves rich, but we would certainly not make ourselves poor. We would live comfortably.

That's not only what we want for ourselves, it's what Peter wanted for Jesus. Jesus was explaining to His disciples that He had to suffer many things, be rejected, be killed, and rise again on the third day. Peter loved Jesus. He could not allow Him to endure such grief and sorrow, and so he rebuked Him.

We don't like suffering. The thought of anyone suffering, even God, is difficult for us to bear. We like Christmas, but not Lent so much. We prefer to hear angels singing than to listen to Jesus moaning. We prefer birth over death, a manger over a cross, "Joy To The World," over "Go To Dark Gethsemane." But that's because of the weakness of our flesh...like Peter. Jesus rebuked him, and He rebukes us. God says, "The word of the cross is, to those who are perishing, foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." (1 Corinthians 1:18) Jesus was preaching the word of the cross and Peter rebuked Him for it. Was Peter one of "those who was perishing?" At that time, yes—for he would not have Jesus go to a cross. Jesus' words were foolishness to him. "No, Jesus," he said, "this shall never happen to you!"

Yet, a Savior without a cross is no Savior. For Jesus to save you from your sins He must suffer and die. Jesus was not telling His disciples what might happen...these things "must happen," He said. That little word "must" in the Greek means that these things are an absolute necessity. In fact, Jesus' sufferings, death, and resurrection, were already determined before the world was created. It was not something God was considering—it was what must take place...period...because of His love and mercy toward us. So when Jesus told His disciples that He must suffer, and be killed, and rise again, He was not asking for their approval. He was not asking for a show of hands. He was saying, "This is the way it is!"

Perhaps the reason we don't care for Lent so much is not because Jesus suffered, but because He suffered for us. We caused Lent. We caused Christmas, too, but that's a "happy" time. Lent is a time of sorrow. Our sins put Jesus on the road to the cross. Because we live to please our sinful flesh, Jesus met the whip, the thorns, and the rod. Jesus wasn't rejected because of what He had done, He was rejected because we have rejected God. He was put to death because you and I have put God out of our life.

We may prefer Christmas to Lent also because we don't decorate a Lenten tree or open presents on Good Friday. And yet, not Christmas, but Lent is what the Christian Faith is all

about. If a dying man had only minutes to live, you would proclaim to him, not Christmas, but Good Friday. Our church sign out front does not say, “We Preach Christ’s Birth,” but “We Preach Christ Crucified”—because “the word of the cross is the power of God to save us.” To believe that Jesus was born in Bethlehem is not what Satan is trying to prevent. Satan doesn’t want you to believe and confess that Christ suffered, died, and rose again—and that He did this for you! Satan didn’t work through King Herod trying to murder the Baby Jesus so that you and I wouldn’t have a merry Christmas; he was trying to keep Jesus from the cross.

That didn’t work, so now we see him using Peter. His one goal, his one aim, is to keep Christ from the cross. Satan had his “must,” too. Jesus “must” was, “I must suffer, die, and rise again.” Satan’s “must” was, “I must keep Jesus from the cross.” The story of Lent tells us that God’s “must” beat Satan’s “must.” Everything that Jesus said must happen did happen. He suffered, He was rejected, He was killed, He rose again. And that’s why we love Christmas. Without Lent, Christmas is nothing. Because Jesus suffered, died, and rose for us, we rejoice that He was born, because He was born to go to the cross for our salvation.

Because Jesus did what He said must happen, we are forgiven of our sins. All of you are forgiven because Jesus suffered, died, and rose for you. Because Satan could not keep Christ from the cross, your baptism means something. It means that you have died and risen with Jesus. That makes you God’s child. Even though you sin daily, as God’s child in Holy Baptism, you have a gracious Father who forgives you for Jesus’ sake. Because Jesus did what He must do, the Lord’s Supper is, for you, a meal of life. Jesus gives you real life there in His body and blood—life that goes on living even when our body is laid into a grave.

Jesus’ “must” beat Satan’s “must,” so Satan changed his “must.” Now, instead of, “I must prevent Jesus from going to the cross,” he is determined to keep you away from the word of the cross. “I must not let the cross,” he says, “come to God’s people.” He cannot stop Christ from dying for you, but he can stop you from coming to where the cross is preached. Satan cannot beat God but he can beat you. How? Not by causing you to suffer here. Not by bringing sickness, pain, and sorrow to you here. He wants you to suffer with him in hell forever. That is his one goal, his one aim. He can’t stop Jesus, but he can stop you. He can stop you from hearing the word of the cross. He knows the Bible well! He knows that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.” (Romans 10) Satan entered Peter, and so he enters your mind. He tells you that “once you know it, you know it...you don’t need to keep hearing it...you don’t need to keep hearing the word of Christ.” Satan is a liar. He knows that if he can keep you from the word of the cross, he’s won.

But friend, do not despair. Peter was a plaything to Satan, but Jesus would not play his game. Even though Satan led Peter down a dark road of sin and denial, Jesus brought him back. He led Peter to repent of his sin and believe the word of the cross. He forgave Peter.

The word of the cross is not what Satan wants you to hear, but Jesus has brought you here to His House today to preach that saving word to you...so that it does what it says—it saves you from your sins, it saves you from eternal death in hell. You never come to God’s sacred House on your own. It’s never just on a whim or a decision you yourself make. It’s

always Jesus who leads you here, just as He leads you into His Word with your family at home.

You and I don't have the strength, the wisdom, the resolve to beat Satan at his own game, but you have a Savior who does. He will not leave you nor forsake you. He was determined to suffer, die, and rise for you, and He is just as determined to keep leading you back to where the cross is preached, to where your sins are forgiven, to where life and salvation are freely offered and given to you.

As Jacob declared when he awoke from his dream, so we, by the power of God also say, "This place is Bethel...the House of God and the Gate of Heaven"—because Christ is here. He is here forgiving sins. He is here making the deaf to hear, the blind to see, the dead to live. He is here to defeat Satan in your life, and this He does by the word of the cross. And that word is clear: Christ died for you, friend. You are forgiven. Heaven is yours in Christ Jesus. Go in peace. Amen.