

**"When Disciples Are Rebuked"**  
**Mark 8:31-38**  
**Second Sunday in Lent, March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015**  
**Pastor Espinosa**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ who suffered and was crucified for us to save us from sin and death. Amen. Today's Gospel based on Mark 8:31-38 is a stunning section in the Bible. Why? Because St. Peter gave the best answer one could possibly give in rightly, accurately, and gloriously identifying Jesus. Based on his answer: "You are the Christ." (Mark 8:29), case closed: Peter knew Jesus. But when Jesus went on to the rest of the story: not only verifying WHO He was, but for WHAT REASON He had come, this is where Peter got lost. And not just a little lost mind you, but totally and utterly confused! So much so that when Peter responded to the LORD explaining His mission he did not speak as he had before with words of God, but this time he spoke with words from Satan!

This is the stunning scene: after Peter rightly and boldly confessed Christ's identity, Jesus – in Matthew's parallel to our Mark text – actually tells Peter that his confession (his words on Christ) were from God. (Matthew 16:17) Peter had just spoken God's word, but now in respect to the WHAT of Jesus (as in WHAT would the Christ *do*?) the LORD makes clear that Peter was now speaking *not* for God, but *for* the devil!

Again, this is so shocking a state of affairs that it appears unfathomable; the implications rattle us so that it's easy to repress its traumatic impact; it is so unsettling that it's almost as if we ignore the seismic contradiction, the cosmic inconsistency, the duplicitous destructiveness of the situation: the believer – and in this case – the apostle, and not merely the apostle, the *leader* of the band (even as Peter was assuredly speaking for them all) spoke for God *and* -- in practically the next breath -- spoke for Satan. The same guy. One man speaking holy and saving words in the one instance; and in the next instance, the same man speaking destructive and evil words.

How can this be? One reason is that all of us underestimate -- like Peter did -- the article of the faith on sin. We have this really nasty habit of reducing this article of the faith called "sin" to bad behavior or the lack of good behavior (called "sins"). When we mistakenly reduce our sin (singular) condition with what we do and don't do – our sins (plural) – we inevitably lose track of our actual diseased condition. How easy it is for us to become blind in any given situation when we feel confident about our actions while forgetting that we still have this horrific problem in us called "sin" (so that in one instance we are speaking the words of God, but in the very next instance we are speaking the words of Satan)?!

Our sin-reductionism puts us in the prime position to do this! Sin is the deeper root problem. It is a disease, a sickness that permeates our nature; it is what makes us sinful – as our Lutheran Confessions state – from "head to toe;" it is what makes us towards God "recalcitrant donkeys." It is the *incurvatus en se* condition, that condition of being turned or curved inward. We are turned in and curved in to love ourselves, and turned in and curved in so that we stray

away from loving God...in fact our curved in and turned in condition makes us love ourselves and love what we want. As a result, it is not that we simply do not believe in God in this sin condition, but in this state we actually hate Him. Peter hated Jesus so much – though he thought with all his might he was saying the right thing – that he was willing to destroy the very mission Jesus was conducting to save you and me (and Peter) from sin! In truth, we are just like Peter: we do both; we speak for and against our Holy God. This is the stunning part of all of this. This is what we are!

But this is nothing new and we are blessed in our Christian tradition to confess our condition this way every time we start our liturgy; our worship. Notice the wording that we used today. Let's read it together and I ask you to take note of what parts are about your sin (singular) and what parts are about your sins (plural). We read together:

***I, a poor, miserable sinner, confess unto You all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended You and justly deserved Your temporal and eternal punishment. But I am heartily sorry for them and sincerely repent of them, and I pray You of Your boundless mercy and for the sake of the holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death of Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to be gracious and merciful to me, a poor, sinful being.***

Note that in this morning's confession, we are confessing both aspects: both our sin (singular) and our sins (plural). It is at the very beginning and the very end of this particular confession of sin that we confess our sin (singular)-condition with the words:

1. "I, a poor, miserable sinner." This is a confession of condition. We are by nature sinful and unclean, so that by nature we are poor, miserable sinners.
2. "A poor, sinful being." Our being (singular) is such that we are continuously committing sins (plural).

This is the core of our confession at the beginning of every Divine Service and is part and parcel of properly preparing to receive The Lord's Supper. And just as it took God

The Father to reveal to Peter WHO Jesus is; it takes God the Father to reveal to us what OUR sinful condition is all about. It is a terribly pessimistic article of the faith. It is not what people are looking for. People don't go looking for churches in hopes that the pastor will tell them that they are an awful, God-hating sinner. It's not usually on the top of anyone's list for finding a church home...we want good music and meaty sermons (maybe), but do we actually go out looking for this revelation about our sin?!

Things came to a head with some former members in another congregation. They finally had to speak up! "Pastor, why do we say this about ourselves?! The Holy Scriptures say that we're born again! The Holy Scriptures say that we're a new creation! These words about being a poor, miserable sinner no longer apply to me! I was ONCE blind, NOW I see; I WAS Lost, but NOW I'm found! Again, I'm a new creation! In Christ, I'm no longer this despicable image! So

why do we still confess this?!" Great question and whenever I get questions like this, I quickly pass them on to the other pastor! ☺

So I answered the question. Our conversion, our crossing over from death to life, our being born again, and becoming a new creation in Christ are all descriptors of your most definitely receiving a new nature. It's true! You are a new creation. You now have a living faith, with new thoughts, new desires, and new impulses. This is God's gift to you through His Word which unites you to the Living Christ. This is a *fides viva*...a living faith, that is a saving faith and not the so-called "faith" of the demons (James 2:19), which is a cold and dead intellectual faith that is worthless (leaving one to live in fear as the demons do). Your faith, however, is living as you have been enabled by God to trust in Jesus and the forgiveness of all your sins (plural) AND the forgiveness of your sin (singular) condition...this too does the blood of Jesus cover!

Such a faith, such a condition, Peter had. He was a child of God and by the grace of God – again – He was able to accurately and powerfully confess that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Children of God cannot speak this way – genuinely in faith – without the Holy Spirit enabling them to speak this way (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 12:3b).

But here we run into being sure that we do not succumb to a logical fallacy called the fallacy of "excluded middle" or an "either-or" fallacy. In this case, the frustrated parishioner was stuck on two options:

EITHER we have ONLY the ONE nature!

OR we have the OTHER nature!

What was missed was a third option. What is the third option? The third option is that we might – and indeed we do – have BOTH! Just like Peter did!

Even Ezekiel's words of removing the old heart of stone (Ezekiel 11:19) is not an immediate eradication of sin in the life of the child of God, but is the introduction of a new spirit that is enabled to follow God just like Peter did (even as we await the day that is to come when our hearts of stone will be completely eradicated...and yes that day will come, but it is not yet...for now, it is not an "either-or," but a "both-and."

But Peter lost track of himself. He forgot that though the LORD has just affirmed that he had spoken words from the Father in heaven, that he was still capable of speaking words from the devil. We do this. How easy it is for us to reason that because we easily and gladly affirm God's Word in so many instances that this somehow makes us impervious to error! Not so. We can affirm the sacredness of our holy marriage to our spouse, but then in the next instance totally dishonor our spouse and fail to respect them. We can affirm the sanctity and gift of our children, but then in the next instance unnecessarily exasperate them because we don't feel like being responsible parents who take the time to teach and to love. We can affirm the article on holy vocation in one breath; and then bemoan our job situation as though we were

living in hell. Well which one is it? Is this job part of my holy vocation for God to work through me around the people I work with; or have I been cursed to Alcatraz around people I hate? Which one do you speak? If you're anything like Peter, you speak both.

But do you ever wonder "what were the other disciples thinking when they witnessed this"? They heard Jesus rebuke Peter in the same way that Jesus rebuked the devil in the wilderness...that's how severe a rebuke it was! In Matthew 4:10 Jesus said to the devil, "Be gone Satan!" In confronting Peter, Jesus turns to him face-to-face IMMEDIATELY and says, "Get out of my sight!" That's what the other disciples witnessed and we too are fascinated to have front-row seats – so to speak – in hearing about this amazing encounter.

When I was a kid, whenever the neighborhood kids and I would hear about someone else getting in trouble, we would make this sound "ooooo!" to punctuate that someone was busted! This was a kind of adolescent schadenfreude (taking pleasure in another's ill fortune). In carrying on about it and in making a spectacle of it, we just brought more attention on whomever was in trouble. We weren't helping the situation. I can picture the other disciples – perhaps not actually wanting to hurt poor Peter – but standing there in shock: "ooooooo!" And perhaps thinking to themselves, "Glad that wasn't *me* just now!" Perhaps we do a little of that! This rebuke seems extreme to say the least. "Glad it wasn't me!"

But it is not right for any of Peter's fellow-sinners – like the in the crowd that our LORD gathered, or the other disciples, and you, and me – to decide that we are any different. So what happens next is that Jesus calmly begins to teach and He goes on to teach about what it means to be a true disciple, a genuine follower of God! This is what He describes...If you are going to really follow the LORD Jesus Christ, then:

1. Deny yourself. (v 34)
2. Take up your cross. (v 34) And if you're going to do this then St. Augustine says that you must "learn to love yourself by not loving yourself." (TLSB 1675)
3. Follow Jesus. (v 34) *Truly* follow Him!
4. You must lose your life if you're going to save it. (v 35) Here, St. Augustine says that you must "kill [in yourself] what is unduly attached to the earthly." (Ancient Christian Commentary, Vol. II, 113)
5. And finally don't be ashamed of the LORD who is not only the glorious LORD, but the Son of Man who suffered, who died...who was crucified! And do not be ashamed of His words...don't ever be like St. Peter was!

So, let me ask you, "How is this going for you?" All of us who look upon this scene where St. Peter is so severely rebuked cannot stand back and react with "ooooooo!" but we must hang our heads and realize that Jesus is also rebuking us. We too are ashamed of what Jesus had to do...we are so ashamed of it, because He had to DIE for OUR sin, for OUR rebellion, for OUR desperate need and we do not measure up to be the disciples we know we ought to be.

But for cast down and rebuked disciples, Jesus comes to proclaim – once again – and this time by the Holy Spirit we may truly listen and we may truly hear! He came to "suffer many

things and be rejected...and be killed, and after three days rise again." (v 31) Why do this? Out of the Father's and the Son's great love for you. Indescribable, unconditional, pure...LOVE. This is what Jesus did...for YOU!

He denied Himself. O Satan tried...He tried and tried, to find a way to stop Jesus in His tracks! "Command these stones to become loaves of bread!" The devil wanted Jesus to prove Himself to be relevant! Oh, how we are dying to be relevant! Jesus said to save you – He was not ashamed of the Word of God for you – "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." (Matthew 4:4); The devil tried again, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down." The devil wanted Jesus to prove Himself to be spectacular when the angels would catch Him! Oh, how we would love to be spectacular! But Jesus said in order to save you and in order to save me, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" (Matthew 4:7) The devil wouldn't give up! "All these [kingdoms] I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." The devil said, "Be powerful, claim your power, show your power!" Oh, how we desire to be powerful! But Jesus answered to save you and to save me, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'" (Matthew 4:10) (On the correspondence to relevance, spectacular and power, see Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Reflections on Christian Leadership*, New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989)

And then poor Peter – like you and like me – he meant well, but he did not speak well...Satan was still trying: "Stop LORD...don't go into Jerusalem!" But for you and for me, Jesus did not stop, because His permitting Himself to suffer means that your eternal suffering is cancelled; His permitting Himself to be rejected means that the LORD does not reject you as you trust in Jesus; His permitting Himself to be killed means that your death has been covered by His life; and sure enough, His resurrection means that you – in spite of any inconsistency that still remains – has been covered. That's why the LORD baptized you; this is why He feeds you right here today with His body and blood; this was why He resisted all temptation...this is why He was the true follower of God; the true disciple...so that you would be saved. Mark 8 is not intended to make you try harder to pull yourself up by your bootstraps. It is rather there to see that in the Lord who resisted all Satanic attacks, Christ has saved you...completely!

Is this all? Yes and no. Yes it is all that needs to be done for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Thank God! But no, in that Jesus is still living. He is still the true disciple of God...He is still living His life...and the rest of the story is that He does so in you. Live in this faith Christian, because as the conquering Lord He lives in sinners – as inconsistent as they are like Peter – in such a way as to show His discipleship...and in hidden, secret ways, Jesus is still denying himself, taking up his cross, and following...He is doing so in and through you. Just as this morning for you, o inconsistent one who is nevertheless completely forgiven and clean, He led you to deny yourself and He got you to church; He led you to take up your cross as you open your mouth which has not always had the best things flow out of it, but here making them God's servants who confess the faith and to praise His Name; and He has led you this morning to follow Him...to receive His forgiveness once again; to eat His body and to drink His blood. There is no better following. In all of this, something miraculous occurs: poor sinners like Peter are not ashamed of Jesus who was crucified for them; they are not afraid to confess

that He did so for *their* sin; and they are not ashamed of His words...how could we be? They are our life! No longer rebuking us, but assuring us: Forgiven!