

Sermon Starter – Beyond Imagination

Mark 8:31-38

The problem: In an age of instant gratification, it's tempting to assume that discipleship is substantially about the perks we get from following Jesus. We expect to live in the peace of Christ, to be filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit, and to be protected by the creator God. So we are shocked when hardships arise because of our faith. We are unsettled when we hear God asking us to give up comfort and embark on a journey for which we see neither hope nor future. Peter must have felt this way when Jesus predicted that he would undergo great suffering, be rejected by the religious community, and face death. These are not the signs of victory or a successful movement. Though Jesus rebukes Peter for setting his mind on human rather than divine things, how can we blame this most human disciple for allowing his survival instinct to kick in?

The grace: Even though Peter is upset enough to rebuke his teacher—and Jesus responds in kind—Jesus does not seem angry about the path that lies before him. What Peter missed, and what we often miss as well, is that Jesus has also said that he would rise in three days. The suffering which Jesus talks about is not the end of the story: there is life which comes even after death, hope in the darkness. Jesus is not calling people to follow him into self-sacrifice out of wooden obedience, but to a way of living and dying that changes the world. This change cannot come about without difficulty. So it is in the promise that God walks with us that we are able to hold on to the vision of new life, not only for ourselves but for the world.

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