

February 23, 2020

Mark 8:27-9:8

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Book of Mark is most likely the first of the four gospel books to be written, sometime in the late 60s CE. In this season of Epiphany (from Christmas to Lent) we read through the first half of the gospel which focuses around the question of the identity of Jesus. In today's selection we move to the midpoint of the story (Mark 8:22). It frames a central section of the gospel, known as the second prologue and call to discipleship that ends in 10:52. This central section reveals the heart of what it means to follow the teaching and example of Jesus. It's sandwiched on both ends by a miracle story of a blind person gaining sight – potentially a metaphor for all who hear the gospel and need to “see” in a new way to get what Jesus is really about and is calling disciples to live.

Caesarea Philippi – major Hellenistic city long known as a spiritual pilgrimage site in the ancient world. At this time it had been rebuilt by Herod Philip (one of Herod's successors) who had built a temple in honor of Emperor Augustus (for whom the town was named). Could this scene be taking place in the shadow of this temple where the Emperor was lifted up as the Lord and Savior of the world?

on the way ὁδός HODOS meaning a road; by implication, a progress (the route, act or distance); figuratively, a mode or means:—journey, (high-)way. is the way in which Mark has Jesus talk about discipleship. It goes back to the way that Isaiah through John the Baptizer announced in the wilderness. It's the description of where Jesus sends his disciples in 6:8 (6Then Jesus went about among the villages teaching. 7 He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. 8 He ordered them to take nothing for **their journey** except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts;) and where the three subpoints of this second prologue of Mark take place: See 8:27 (and **on the way** he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?”); 9:33 (33 Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you arguing about **on the way**?”), 10:21 (21 Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”). Shorty it will be revealed as the way that leads to Jerusalem and the cross. 11:8 (Many people spread their cloaks **on the road**, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields.) We know from Acts 9:2 that the early Christians were first named as “the People **of the Way**” – pointing back to this metaphor.

Messiah (Hebrew: מָשִׁיחַ) (or Christ from the Greek χριστός) is a savior or liberator of a group of people. In the Hebrew Bible usually a king or High Priest traditionally anointed with holy anointing oil. The Messiah was thought to be a promised human leader, physically descended from the paternal Davidic line through King David and King Solomon, a military and religious leader who would reunite the tribes of Israel, overcome and defeat the enemies of Israel and usher in a Messianic Age of global universal peace, and the world to come. Here Peter identifies Jesus as the Messiah, but when Jesus then reveals his vocation and destiny as the Messiah Peter rejects it for whatever preconceived notion he had of the Messiah from his experience, culture, and religious education.

²⁷ Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and **on the way** he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” ²⁸ And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” ²⁹ He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the **Messiah**.” ³⁰ And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

³¹ Then he began to teach them that **THE SON OF MAN** must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to **rebuke** him. ³³ But turning and looking at his disciples, he **rebuked** Peter and said, “*Get behind me, Satan!* For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

³⁴ He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and **take up their cross** and **FOLLOW ME**.” ³⁵ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for

the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶ For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷ Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸ Those who are **ashamed** of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them will also be **ashamed** when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

9 ¹ And he said to them, “Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see **that the kingdom of God has come with power.**”

² Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high **MOUNTAIN** apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³ and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵ Then Peter said to Jesus, “*Rabbi*, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁶ He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷ Then a **cloud** overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “*This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!*” ⁸ Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

QUESTIONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF EXAMEN & CONTEMPLATION

- **What part of today’s story grabs you?**
- **How do you hear the parable of the Crazy Farmer (Mk 4:1-20) underneath and within this text?**
- **The story is all about political and social confrontation. How do you see that in the text & teachings?**
- **What invitation to journey on the Way of Jesus do you hear in the text today?**

rebuke ἐπιτιμάω or epitimaó; meaning to honor in due measure, to secure, to rebuke, chide, warn or admonish. we see Peter trying to fix, control Jesus, assuming that his place is superior that of Jesus.

THE SON OF MAN Jesus switches from the title of Messiah to this title (from Daniel) for the remainder of the story. Could he be trying to reframe the vision of Messiah by rejecting a title that had become trapped in preconceived ideas?

Get behind me, Satan Satan literally means “the one who divides.” Here Jesus tells Peter, who seems to have stepped out in front of Jesus to tell him what to do, that followers of Jesus are to come after him, walking in his Way, living by his example. *Get behind me* is a synonym then to **FOLLOW ME**. We see also an echo of the parable of the sower and the seed, in which the seed thrown by the crazy farmer on path (way - ὁδός) risk having the word taken by Satan Mark 4:1-20 and verse 14.

take up their cross The cross only had one connotation in the Roman Empire; upon it dissidents were executed. Crucifixion was and remained a political and military punishment...Among the Romans it was inflicted above all on the lower classes, i.e., slaves, violent criminals, and the unruly elements in rebellious provinces, not least Judea... These were primarily people who on the whole had no rights, in other words, groups whose development had to be suppressed by all possible means to safeguard law and order in the state

Taking up the cross was a specific, thought not invariable, part of the Roman custom. The person condemned to crucifixion was ordered to carry his own cross to the place of death.” In this way crucifixion was truly a horrific public shaming of the condemned. (Ched Myers 245-6).

FOLLOW ME ἀκολουθέω or akoloutheó: to follow one who precedes, join him as his attendant, accompany him - in both a physical and metaphorical/existential sense. It was extensively used in the ancient world to describe a master (teacher) and disciple relationship.

ashamed ἐπαισχυνθῆ - may be ashamed of – We don’t have the same social dynamics around honor and shame – but in the ancient world, losing status in society was one of the worst things possible. It could be that Jesus is talking not about himself as much as the loss of honor and status that is associated with crucifixion and the way of life in which one takes up his/her cross.

that the kingdom of God has come with power We’re quick to spiritualize this power, but it very likely is Jesus referring to the power of the kingdom which will appear in his defeat and the triumph of both Rome and the Sanhedrin in his crucifixion.

MOUNTAIN God is repeatedly experienced on mountaintops in the Bible. Think of Moses and the 10 commandments, & Elijah.