

17th Sunday after Pentecost
Sunday, September 15, 2024

Introduction to the day

Three weeks ago we heard Peter's confession of faith as told in John's gospel. This week we hear Mark's version, when Peter says, "You are the Messiah." In John, the stumbling block is Jesus' invitation to eat his flesh, given for the life of the world. In Mark too the scandal has to do with Jesus' words about his own coming death, and here Peter himself stumbles over Jesus' words. But Jesus is anointed (the meaning of *messiah*) in Mark only on the way to the cross (14:3); so we are anointed in baptism with the sign of the cross.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Let us pray. . . .

O God, you declare your almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity. Grant us the fullness of your grace, that, pursuing what you have promised, we may share your heavenly glory; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

FIRST LESSON: Proverbs 1:20-33

In these verses Wisdom is personified as a woman who invites all who will listen to follow her. Though Wisdom offers her hand to those who scoff at her, they spurn all such counsel. That they come to ruin is predictable. Those who find Wisdom, however, find life.

PSALM: Psalm 19

SECOND LESSON: James 3:1-12

This text uses various images to illustrate how damaging and hurtful the way we speak to and about others can be. Not only are we to control our speech, but what we say and how we say it are to reflect our faith.

GOSPEL: Mark 8:27-38

This story provides the turning point in Mark's gospel. Peter is the first human being in the narrative to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah, but he cannot accept that as the Messiah Jesus will have to suffer. Moreover, Jesus issues a strong challenge to all by connecting discipleship and the cross.

GOSPEL MESSAGE

Falling in Line

It is never easy to think about bad things happening to the people we love. When unpleasant topics like illness or death come up, we're likely to say things like, "Oh, let's just not talk about it," or "It would never come to that!" So it is understandable that Peter scoffs when Jesus talks about his own suffering. Peter cannot fathom it. We, too, have a difficult time understanding God's ways, and like Peter, we sometimes resist when confronted with a hard truth.

However, Jesus is unfazed. There are many ways to interpret what he says in reply: Maybe it is a rebuke, calling Peter out when he got it wrong. It could be a protective statement, like a parent calling out to their small child who has run too far ahead on the street; it may sound harsh, but it is love. Or

perhaps it could be Jesus calling his followers to fall in line—a call to action. “We have places to go,” Jesus may be saying, “and you cannot follow from the front.”

Whatever the case, Jesus points to the cross and warns of its costs. For his disciples, it will mean taking a stand against the powers of the world, perhaps even against their own families. In our baptism, we are marked with that same cross, and Jesus calls us to the same mission: to pick up our cross and follow him.

We live in a complicated world, and sometimes the path of discipleship is unclear. Sometimes we get it wrong, or get a little too far ahead, or lose our way entirely. But we trust in Jesus, our wise teacher, to lovingly correct us and set us on our way again. Through the cross, God gives us life and gives us freedom to go out, confront unpleasant truths, and do whatever we need to do for others. Nothing stands in our way.

THE PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Drawn together in the power of the Holy Spirit, we pray with confidence for the church, God’s good creation, and all who are in need.

We pray for the church throughout the world. Form us into communities of forgiveness and grace. Help us to notice where you are calling us into new relationships, and give us courage to embrace the uncomfortable and unfamiliar. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We pray for the earth and all its inhabitants. Protect lands at risk of wildfire and heal dying forests. Where fire brings destruction, raise up new growth. Guide us in tending precarious ecosystems. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We pray for those who govern nations, tribes, and cities. Open them to the cries of people in need. Direct them in shaping policies that prioritize the health and well-being of all who struggle with hunger and housing insecurity. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We pray for all who are ill, all who are lonely or anxious, and all who grieve. We especially pray for: Linda Boland, Sandra Gagnon, Shirley Glickman, Walter Hobden, Donna L. Hoffman, Bill Lorbetkie, Glenda Panke, Marilyn Schneider, Danny Schultz, Doug Sell, Debbie Thom, Keith Weckwerth, Denita Wolfgram, Elaine Yourth, Harold Yourth, Stephanie Yourth, and those in long term care facilities and senior residences. We name out loud or in the quiet of our hearts those who need your healing touch. (pause). Draw them close to you and soothe them with the promise of your enduring love. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We pray for teachers, professors, librarians, school administrators, staff, and all who support the education of young people. Sustain them as they shape learning communities, rooted in equity and authenticity. We pray for children of all ages in their learning. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We remember our beloved dead, who with the great cloud of witnesses bear witness to your saving grace. Accompany us in our pilgrimage of faith, that we too place our hope and trust in you. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We entrust these and all our prayers to you, holy God, in the name of your beloved child, Jesus Christ, our Savior. **Amen.**

BLESSING

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look upon you with favor and ☩ give you peace.

Amen

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

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