

18th Sunday after Pentecost
September 26, 2021
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Mark 8:27-35
God's Plan

Mark 8:27–35 (NIV84)

Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, “Who do people say I am?” ²⁸ *They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.”* ²⁹ *“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Christ.”* ³⁰ *Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.* ³¹ *He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.* ³² *He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.* ³³ *But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. “Get behind me, Satan!” he said. “You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”* ³⁴ *Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.* ³⁵ *For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.”*

Dear Friends in Christ,

What do you want to be when you grow up? We ask that question to preschoolers even though some of us adults are still trying to figure it out. The preschooler who loves animals wants to be a veterinarian. The 5 year old who loves to play with cars wants to be a race car driver. Another who loves their teacher wants to be a teacher. Another wants to be a fire fighter. It is possible that someone ends up doing what they wanted to do in preschool, but not often. Our likes and dislikes change. Our plans for life change. Circumstances in our life change. Even when we grow up we may change our plans or fail to carry out our plans.

God's plan is different. His plan to save the world from sin and death did not change and has not changed and will not change. God's plan is far different than any of us would have designed. And that is good because God's plan to save actually saves. Human plans have and will always fail to give eternal salvation. Jesus reveals God's plan to his disciples, to the crowd and to us today in Mark 8.

God's Plan is for Christ to Suffer

Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, “Who do people say I am?” ²⁸ *They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.”* ²⁹ *“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Christ.”*

Peter gets a A+ for the quiz. Finally Peter got the right answer and for once, did not put his foot in his mouth. Jesus is the Christ. This is part of God's plan. He promised to send fallen humans a Savior from Genesis to Malachi. Along the way, God sent others. Moses, Abraham, David, Elijah, Jeremiah and

John the Baptist. These were all great leaders and prophets and kings for their people. All pointed to the Christ to come. And Peter, speaking for the others, figured it out. Jesus was not just one of the prophets, he was the one and only Christ promised by God.

Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

This short line is very interesting. Why wouldn't Jesus want the disciples to spread this news that Jesus is the Christ? The problem is that most people had a different plan for the Christ than God did. Many of the Jews, including the disciples and especially the Jewish leaders wanted the Christ to reign over an earthly kingdom. Their plans for the Christ were a strong and secure kingdom of Israel, free from foreign oppressors, prosperous in trade, a land filled with milk and honey. If you spread the news that the Christ had arrived, uprisings and riots may start as people try to usher in or fight against the new King of the Jews. However, God's plan for the Christ had nothing to do with restoring a physical kingdom of Israel.

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

God's plan is for his one and only Son to suffer. And Jesus will not just suffer a little. He will suffer the shame of being rejected by his own people. He will suffer injustice in the trials before the Sanhedrin and before Pilate. He will suffer physically from the lashes that tore into his back, the crown of thorns that pierced his brow, and the nails that pierced his hands and feet. Jesus, true God from all eternity, would suffer the death of a murderer. This is God's plan to save you.

Peter doesn't like God's plan.

Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

Before we are too hard on Peter, we might consider how we have at times thought God's plan was not the best plan. It happens when we consider problems in this world to be bigger problems than our sin against the Holy God. We want God's plan to be curing cancer, at least for my loved one with cancer. We want God's plan to be to get rid of covid forever. If we were in God's place we would end hunger in the world. If I were God, I would replace the person in the white house or the governors mansion or the school board seat or in the CEO's office. Peter rebuked Jesus for revealing God's plan for the Christ to suffer and die. We take Jesus aside and rebuke him when we think God is falling short of fixing the problems we want fixed.

Peter got a sharp reply and so should we. Our biggest problem is not a disease or disaster or elected official. My sin is the biggest problem I have. In Jesus' sharp reply we have a call to repentance and a call to trust in God's plan. For Christ's suffering and death has paid for our sins. His once and for all payment for the sin of the world has been made. We are forgiven. Our biggest problem has been solved by God's plan.

While the payment was made once at the cross, the forgiveness is applied to us again and again. We need his forgiveness daily for we sin daily. If we ever get the point where we no longer think we need daily forgiveness, we are in a dangerous place. For the person who thinks of their sin as a mere annoyance or as something that is under control will eventually drift from Christ because they don't think they need the very thing he gives – forgiveness of sins. Friends in Christ, don't drift, but instead,

daily return to the Christ who accomplished God's plan for you – the forgiveness of sins through the suffering of Christ.

God's Plan is for You to Suffer

Peter and the disciples learn God's plan for the Christ to suffer and they didn't like it. Now, here is the difficult part. Jesus says that we who follow him will also suffer.

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it."

After we figure out what we want to be when we grow up, we might begin to have an image in our heads as to what our life will look like. We plan our school years and what we will study to get into the job we want. We see a spouse in the picture and 2.5 children. There is a house in a nice neighborhood. We might see activities with the kids, family vacations and backyard BBQs with friends. We plan out our retirement and see travel to beautiful locations, visits from grandchildren and lots of rest and relaxation. Oh, we have plans. God's plans for us in this world may not be the same.

Jesus tells believers to expect to suffer. Having plans for your life is fine. It is good to plan and work and save to accomplish a plan for your life. But be ready to take up your cross when it comes. We live in a sinful, fallen, cursed world. Our WELS pastor in Overland Park, Kansas died last week. He was about 5 years younger than me. We will pray for his wife and four children today because they suddenly have a cross put upon them. Their husband and father will not be with them for the rest of their lives on earth. This was certainly not part of their plan for life. Every believer will experience some kind of suffering, some kind of cross in this life. It may be a sickness or death in the family. It may be a hard to get along with person at work or in your own family. It might be living under a corrupt and oppressive government. It may be persecution for standing firm on the truth of the Bible.

It is God's plan for us to take up our cross and follow Jesus. While we do not seek out suffering, we do not run from it either. For if we make our life's goal to avoid every suffering, we will be running from one thing to the next to try to escape. This leads some to substance abuse, others to jumping jobs when something is difficult, and others to denying Christ when tough questions are asked. As disciples of Jesus, we expect suffering in this life. We look to Jesus and his cross for strength. For his cross forgives. His cross accomplished our eternal salvation. What can man do to me? Christ has saved me by his cross. Therefore I gladly take up whatever cross is placed on me in this life.

So what do you want to be when you grow up? We want to be what God has made us to be through the cross of Christ. We are forgiven children of God who follow Jesus whatever the cost.

Amen.