

# Sermon: Lent 2

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February 25, 2018

Year B

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

Psalm 22:22-30

Romans 4:13-25

Mark 8:31-38

Jesus and the disciples were in the northern borderlands... they were on their way to Caesarea Philippi... and Jesus asked them who the people said he was... some said John the Baptist... others said Elijah... some said a prophet... but he pushed the point... and asked them... *But who do you say I am...* and Peter answered... the Messiah...

It wasn't Lent for Jesus and the disciples... the way it is for us... but things were getting darker... and he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo suffering... and be rejected... and killed... but after three days he'd rise again... and he said this quite openly... quite blatantly... to the disciples... and within the hearing of those who were standing nearby... and Peter was like... *Jesus... this is not safe talk...*

This was Jesus' first Passion prediction... and Peter had given up a lot to follow Jesus... maybe he didn't want to sit at Jesus' right hand or left hand in Heaven... the way James and John will in two chapters... but Jesus' death certainly wasn't Peter's idea of a successful run... Peter and the others must have heard suffering... rejection... and death... but probably couldn't hear... rise again... and even if they heard it... they had no reference point for what that could mean... and besides... Galilee was the hotbed of insurgency... and for these Jews... success meant deliverance from Roman oppression... so dying was... just... out... of the question... thank you... and Peter told him so...

And Jesus said to Peter... *Get behind me... you who measure success by the world's yardstick and not by Heaven's...* Jesus said... *Get behind me... you who can't see that I'm following God's holy plan...* Jesus said... *Get behind me... you who accuse and*

*divide... rather than seek reconciliation and unity... maybe Jesus even said... Get behind me... you who believe that baptism ends suffering... instead of beginning it...*

And Jesus said loud enough for all to hear... *If you want to follow me... you've got to take up your cross...* so that means we've got to take up our crosses... but just what does it mean to take up our cross...

Does it mean that God wants us to suffer... to endure suffering... just... only... for suffering's sake... I don't believe so... not at all... but there is... absolutely... undeniably... suffering in this world... there is suffering from disease... from injury or accident... from mean spiritedness... but there is also suffering we bring upon ourselves... both individually and corporately... so there are two kinds of questions we can ask... the first kind is... to what extremes do we go... to avoid suffering... do we rail against it... do we live in gated communities... do we hire bodyguards... engage in unethical business practices to get the money for the first two... do we live in denial... do we blame others when we're held accountable for something we've done... do we make our big sins into pebbles... and our small good deeds into mountains... so we can be seen standing on street corners... like the hypocrites do...

And the second kind of question is... are we willing to be transformed by suffering... when it comes from reaping the seeds we've sown... or from the disorder of a broken world... and "being transformed by a broken world"... often means that we turn right around and transform it back... we may not be responsible for the brokenness... not all of it... but we are... somewhat at least... responsible for repairing it...

In our *Agnus Dei*... the Lamb of God... we acknowledge that there is only One... who can take away the sins of the world... but as God's Hands in the world... we are called to perform *Tikkun Olam*... to help repair the world... this idea comes from the Mishnah... the body of classical rabbinic teachings from around 200 CE... there... it refers specifically to social justice that provides extra protection to those at increased

risk... but it has come to mean improving things that may not even be broken... but which can be increased... like wisdom... or compassion... or forgiveness... and the teenage survivors of the shootings on Ash Wednesday... when seventeen died... have taken up their crosses... and they are working to repair the world... so that they and the students who come after them... and many others... can be safer...

In today's reading from Genesis... we certainly hear God's promise to Abram... who becomes Abraham... but are we able to hear anything about God's promise to Abraham's wife... Abraham is satisfied with his son Ishmael through Hagar... and says to Elohim... *If only Ishmael could be before your face...* if only you would recognize him as my rightful heir... so that I may pass my inheritance on to him... so that the legacy you have promised me will not be lost... and in v. 19... God says... *No...* But listen again to vv. 15 - 16... *God said to Abraham... as for your wife... you shall not call her Sarai... but Sarah shall be her name...* Sarah... the one who exerts herself... the one who persists... the one who perseveres... *I will bless her... and I will give you a son by her... I will bless her... and she shall give rise to nations... and the kings of peoples... shall come from her...* Isaac shall be... Son of Woman...

But in the patriarchal framework of our theology... when we look through our patriarchy-colored glasses... it may be difficult to see that God gives Sarah equal billing with Abraham... Abraham's faith may have been reckoned to him as righteousness... but it was through Sarah... that the Davidic line came... and Jesus was Mary's son... Son of Woman... he was the fruit of her womb... and the flesh of her body...

Feminist and theologian Sallie McFague... understands the model of the universe... as the body of God... and invites us to do something that Christians have seldom done... think about God and bodies... what would it mean... for instance... to understand sin as the refusal to share the basic necessities of survival with other bodies... what would it mean... to see Jesus of Nazareth as the paradigm of God's love for bodies... what would it mean... to interpret creation... as all the myriad forms of matter embodied forth

from God and empowered with the breath of life... what would it mean... to consider ourselves as inspirited bodies intimately connected with all other bodies... and yet... understanding ourselves as co-stewards with God for the well-being of our planet...

Incarnation goes beyond Jesus of Nazareth... to include all matter... God is incarnated in creation itself... and this suggests that God is closer to us than we are to ourselves... for God is the Ruach that gives life to the billions of different bodies that make up God's body... but God is also the source... power... and goal... of everything that is... creation depends utterly upon God... that is... I think... why Jesus said... *what you do to the least of these... you do to me*... such a focus causes us to see a relationship between God and the world... that we have not seen before...

God grieves with the families and friends of the seventeen... who were killed on the day we acknowledge our mortality... and whose broken bodies were buried after that day's saint's day... but in this circumstance... God blesses what God can... and what God can't bless... God redeems... and yes... there is suffering in life... some of rises out of our own broken-ness... and some of it rises out of the broken people in our lives... or with whom we come into contact... some of it... out of the broken systems that we have created... or have allowed to be created... but that suffering can bear fruit... we can carry those crosses... when we begin to see how we can perform *Tikkun Olam* in the world... Romans 8:22-23 tells us that creation itself is groaning in labor pains... waiting to be born... and not only creation... but we too who have the first fruits of the Spirit... we groan... while we wait to be healed and strengthened and restored and repaired...

We are not asked to bear the Cross that Jesus bore... we are not asked to save the world... but we are asked to bear the cross of change... of transformation... the cross that comes when we finally acknowledge that we are an integral part of something incomprehensibly large... something that equips us... as Jesus said... to not only do the works that he did... but to do even greater works...

In Mark's Gospel... Jesus wants not just believers... but committed followers to walk The Way with him... we're all in this together... and those who want to disbelieve that... those who want to erect physical or emotional walls... to isolate themselves... and protect what they have or think they deserve... are simply walling themselves off from God...

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