

St Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Pentecost 17 – September 24th and 27th, 2009

Mark 8:27-35

²⁷Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, “Who do people say I am?” ²⁸They 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.” ³⁰Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

³¹He 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. ³²He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But 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.”

³⁴Then 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. ³⁵For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.

Dear children of God who are filled with God's Love. Amen

Back in 1922 a man named Howard Carter made a startling discovery. While he was doing archeology work in the Valley of the Kings in Egypt he came upon a tomb that was fully intact. The tomb as well as the treasures inside the tomb were still there. To this day, it is the most intact discovery of one of the pharaohs of ancient day Egypt. After he discovered the tomb and its treasure, he wanted to find out whose tomb he had discovered. Was it a famous Pharaoh? After doing the work he discovered that it was the tomb of what is often referred to as a minor pharaoh. The tomb was that of King Tut or King Tutankhamun. He also found out that King Tut who ruled around 1324 B.C. was only about 18 or 19 years old when he died and he had ruled Egypt for ten years. He died at a young age most likely of gangrene from complications of breaking his leg pretty badly. Because he had died at a young age, he didn't have a great and wonderful structure for his tomb which is part of the reason that his tomb went uncovered for so many years. The treasures that were unearthed by Mr. Carter went on display where millions and millions of people viewed them. That discovery by Mr. Carter in 1922 has made King Tut the most well known of all the rulers of Egypt.

As we sit here today in God's house, it is interesting to note that many people know more about a boy king of Egypt who died over 3000 years ago than they know about Jesus who gave his life for the sins of the whole world on a cross just over 2000 years ago. It seems that people will flock to whatever seems famous and interesting just like a bug is attracted to the bright light. But today God gives us all another opportunity to look into his holy Word to find out exactly who Jesus was and is and to find out exactly why he came to this earth. It may not be flashy and it most likely won't draw lots of attention, but it is the most important discovery that sinful people like us need to know. Our theme will be the simple question:

Sermon Theme: Who Is Jesus?

- 1. Identify the person**
- 2. Identify his purpose**

1. Identify the person

The disciples and Jesus spent a lot of time together. They walked together, ate together, and talked together. The disciples were not isolated from the people around them. They knew what others were saying about Jesus. Jesus gives his disciples a chance to process what had been going on. Jesus gives them an opportunity to examine who this Jesus is, to think it over.

He does this by first of all asking, **“Who do people say I am?”** The answers the disciples gave showed the ignorance of the people. Some felt he was John the Baptist. John the Baptist was dead, beheaded by Herod. So, they thought Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead. Others felt he was Elijah. Elijah was prophesied to be the forerunner of Jesus. Malachi wrote, **“See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. (Malachi 4:5)** They felt that what Jesus was doing, his miracles and his powerful message was good, but was only a precursor to the great Messiah that was coming, who would be even better! Still, others felt that Jesus was just another Old Testament prophet.

“But what about you? Who do you say I am?” Peter responds on behalf of the disciples, **“You are the Christ!”** That is, “You are the Messiah that was promised in the Old Testament.” They knew he was a human being. They had seen him eat, seen him sleep, and seen him walk as a regular human being. They knew he was also God. His Words were spoken with authority; he performed miracles that only God can do. You would think that Jesus would encourage the disciples to boldly confess this truth about Jesus. Instead, he warns them not to tell anyone about him. The world was not ready for the biblical messiah. They wanted an earthly Savior from the Romans. They wanted someone who could make all their earthly problems, like hunger, away. Why conceal who Jesus is? Not only were people confused about who Jesus is, they were also confused as to why Jesus was here.

2. Identify his purpose

Jesus very plainly said 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. In suffering many things, not just the whip, but the rejection that God has for all mankind, in dying the death that was meant for all mankind. The glory of God is in the cross, not in stomachs that are full, nor wads of cash in wallets.

Wouldn't it be nice if that's what it was? Wouldn't it be nice if our God filled our pockets with cash, that our lives were considerably better than those around us, so that people would be attracted to our church because of how great things are going for those who attend. Wouldn't it be nice that in the front of church there was a treasure chest instead of a cross? That instead of leaving church with our wallets weighing less they would be weighing more? Wouldn't it be nice if we could leave church healthier than when we came in?

But that would not be true to the Biblical fact. Jesus did not come to this earth with the goal of erasing all earthly problems, nor did he come to line our wallets with cash. We have bigger problems. He could have cured world hunger, but all souls would still hunger forever in hell after they died. The cross was his goal. He wanted to cure us of sin that infects everyone.

It is a cross that offends. When Jesus talked about suffering and dying, that was an offense to Peter. Why would he have to be rejected by the entire religious community? Why would the Messiah have to suffer and die like a criminal? It is an offense to many today as well. Why focus on Jesus death and resurrection all the time, isn't our lives here on earth worth our attention? The work of Jesus was not to bring physical blessing to anyone. It was to bring spiritual blessing to all. All had sinned. All were corrupt. All were sentenced justly to hell. The evidence is overwhelming. The judgment is just. But the judge had other plans.

He sent a perfect Jesus to suffer the punishment meant for sinners, to die the death sentenced to sinners. This is the plan of God. That is a fact. How does this fact affect our lives? Let us look to Scripture to hear the facts. **“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.”** The cross by itself isn't a very warm symbol, is it? Why do Christians put a symbol of death as the centerpiece of our worship space? Ever think of that? It would be like putting an electric chair in the front of church. But it is the center of our worship. When we gaze on it, we are reminded that our sins put somebody on there. When we gaze on it, we are comforted that he took on all our sin. His death was your death. When we hear the Word of God proclaimed to us, we hear about the cross. The meaning of the cross brings warmth to our hearts.

What does the cross compete against? Jesus tells us. Ourselves. Our needs, our desires, compete against the center of our faith. That is a fact. Satan will throw temptation at you to think that there is nothing more to life than life. He'll throw poor health, money problems, and deteriorating relationships into the picture to get you sidetracked. He holds out the pursuit of wealth, the pursuit of rewarding friendships, and perfect health as alternatives to Christ.

At the center of our worship stands the cross, for it is the sufferings and death of Jesus that is the center of our faith. Each Sunday we are reminded as we enter our place of worship what is the center. Each Sunday we confess our sins to God and to our pastor what we have let get in front of the cross. Each Sunday our pastor stands in the place of God and announces to you that your sins are forgiven. His proclamation removes them. The cross reminds us of who we are because of Christ. The forgiveness it freely gives empowers us to live as followers of Christ.

As followers of Christ, we carry his cross. We don't need to suffer for our sins like he did, but we do face hardships. We face hardships because we are living in a sinful world. That we know. What about the hardships because we follow Jesus? In case you haven't noticed, some of the teachings we as a church believe in are not popular even among Christian churches. Why do we hold onto them? Because we like being the only ones right? I hope not. It's not about us. We don't believe what we believe because some intelligent group of people handed it down to us. We believe it because God's Word has set us straight. We follow Jesus by holding onto all of what the Bible says, and being careful to let the Bible set us straight.

If you're anything like me, you don't like to have someone point out when you are wrong. However, if I'm going to suffer for something, I'd like to be able to know that I'm suffering for what is right. That's called denying one's self, isn't it? So, let's make sure you're taking up a cross, and not your ego, when you face hardships for what you believe.

In just a few short minutes we will confess what we believe using the words of the Nicene Creed. Do so, knowing that you have the facts straight -- the facts that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the only Savior of the world. The facts that he came to give you salvation, not just food in your earthly stomachs, and the facts that following Jesus means carrying his cross. Amen.