

Lent2B March 1, 2015
Grace and Peace Lutheran Church, Evansville, IN
Roberta Meyer

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16
Psalm 22:23-31
Romans 4:13-25
Mark 8:31-38

What You Want and What You Get Are Two Different Things

That is what my Grandma used to tell me when I voiced something I wanted that she didn't think I should have. And in a way that is what Jesus is telling Peter in our Gospel text for today.

What was going on in our Gospel lesson? Let's go back to verse 27 to get the full meaning of what is happening in this story. Jesus was walking with his disciples and asked, "*Who do the people say I am?*"

"Some say 'John the Baptizer,' they said. 'Others say 'Elijah.' Still others say 'one of the prophets.'"

He then asked, "And you—what are you saying about me? Who am I?"

Peter gave the answer: "You are the Christ, the Messiah." (Message Bible)

Peter, at that moment had a realization that Jesus is the Messiah, the savior of the world. Can you imagine how he felt? And Jesus didn't deny it. He just told them to be careful who they told. In fact, keep it quiet. Don't tell anyone, because some bad stuff is going to happen.

That wasn't what Peter wanted to hear! If Jesus is the Messiah, then, what in the world is he talking about? He would "*suffer, be tried and found guilty by the elders, high priests, and religion scholars, be killed...*" Jesus was still talking, but I don't think Peter was listening. He didn't seem to hear Jesus' last statement that "*after three days [he would] rise up alive.*" (NRSV)

What Peter heard was about suffering and dying and no, this couldn't be right. He knew Jesus is the Messiah. Messiahs don't suffer and die. He had to stop Jesus from talking like that. That is not what Peter wanted. Peter wanted the Messiah to barge in and defeat the Roman Empire setting the Jewish people free. But, instead, it seemed to him, that Jesus was not living up to the name, "Messiah."

Peter "rebuked" Jesus for saying such things unbecoming to a Messiah. Jesus rebuked back. You could say Jesus plain told Peter off. "*Get behind me, Satan!*"

"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 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." (NRSV)

Jesus did promise new life. Peter just didn't understand this idea of sacrificial love. Sacrifice and victory didn't add up.

Jesus lived his whole life on earth showing us that it is in those very low places where suffering is at a peak, that God comes and brings us through it, strengthening us and blessing us with God's promise of unconditional love. In these places God takes what looks like weakness and shows strength and transforms what looks like disgrace and reveals God's surprising life-giving glory.

Last Sunday, we had a Black History program here. During that program we heard stories of people who understand what Jesus means by "embracing suffering, and carrying their cross." Our own Rachel Mayes told a story about how she received a phone call that made derogatory remarks about her gender and race and threatened her safety at her workplace. She told how she kept working and doing her best in spite of feeling unwelcomed, to say the least. In the end she is a very successful business woman at Alcoa. She has advanced to the top. She is loved and respected by those who work with her. She embraced suffering and experienced new life.

We also listened to a poem written by our Mary Moore about Rosa Parks, who endured slander and abuse to humbly lead what many call the beginning of the Modern Civil Rights Movement in 1955. She was arrested and suffered to change laws that were unjust.

Then Pastor Cliff Herring shared his story about traveling to Texas with Walt Wangerin and the Sounds of Grace. These brave young people arrived in Texas to sing at a church where they were obviously unwelcomed. They were shunned and told not to touch the sound equipment. They told Walt they knew they were unwanted and begged to just leave. Walt told them. "This is the very church we need be singing at." They did sing.

It was hard at first. But because they were strong enough to stand up and sing to God's Glory in the midst of a hostile environment, something amazing happened. The Spirit was alive and present that day moving among that white church through the voices of a young African American choir. By the end of the performance the once unwelcoming congregation was reaching out to shake the dark hands of the choir members as they walked down the aisle to leave. All these people bravely embraced suffering, allowing God's strength to carry them through, and they witnessed new life, born in the rumble of suffering.

I haven't seen the movie, yet, but last Sunday, when I watched part of the Academy Awards I did see the performance of the song "Glory" from the movie "Selma". The words of that song are powerful. They sing of suffering and walking through it, as brave people carrying their crosses like Jesus and in that they find Glory! They didn't want violence. But their bravery gave them more than they hoped for. It gave them Glory.

That's what Jesus is talking about in our Gospel. By following Jesus' example we are called to witness to God's Glory where things seem lost. We are not called to be door mats, stomped on and abused. But we are called go boldly where abuse happens and bravely stand with the weak. It's not what we want, but what we get is the promise that resurrection happens in these places. Listen. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HEFRPLM0nEA>