

“A Faith that Exceeds Expectations”

Text: Mark 8:27-38

Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, and Samuel. What do all these Biblical figures have in common? The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says it is their faith. He states: “Of whom the world was not worthy.” (Hebrews 11:38)

The faith of these people was extraordinary, but as we learned in the sermon last Sunday, faith is a creation of God. It is the Holy Spirit who creates faith in us and continues its growth. Truly these people were special, a cut apart from others. You may know someone like that, or maybe even you are that way. I remember that one of my professors in the seminary warned us that because we were pastors we should not think our faith was greater than anyone else’s. He said: “Grandma Schmidt will put you to shame with her faith.”

What does faith call for from you? What did it call for from the disciples? Peter came up with a great confession of faith in Jesus as the Messiah. When Jesus explained what being the Messiah meant, Peter’s faith stumbled. Your faith does not center on what you can understand, but rather upon what Jesus Christ has accomplished for you. In matters of faith it is not about what the world understands, but rather it is about Jesus Christ and God’s plan of salvation through him. In response to what he has done, you follow him and you have-

A FAITH THAT EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS

I. It has its foundation in the work of Jesus

II. It defies worldly logic

I.

A.1. Two significant events are begun by our text. The first is Peter’s confession of faith, and Jesus’ subsequent explanation of

his work on our account. The other is the Transfiguration that explains it in a more visual way. Verse 32 says that Jesus spoke plainly to them about his life and work. The question the text seems to be asking is: “Who is Jesus?” As St. Mark tells us, he is telling something about you as well. As a follower of Jesus, his life is intertwined with yours. You are identified with your Savior. What he stands for, you stand for too.

2. What were people saying about Jesus? At the same time, he is looking for an answer from them as well. King Herod, who had the John the Baptist beheaded, had an unrealized fear that John would come back from the dead. Several weeks ago we heard about the prophet Elijah. He did not die and was escorted into heaven on a chariot of fire. Another notion was that one of the prophets of old had come back to life. All of these were incorrect and it was one of the reasons why Jesus would not allow them to tell them was St. Peter had confessed.

B. 1. The people of that day had some very political ideas about the Messiah. Some had some spiritual notions, but none of them really talked about who Jesus really was. Suffering and death, that was too much for Peter to handle. That is not the kind of Messiah that the world wants. The way Jesus depicted it seemed so gruesome.

Yet this was God’s plan of salvation and not man’s. He came into your world to accomplish your salvation. As a Christian, you don’t have the view of the world. Like those mentioned in Hebrews, you are different from those around you, if you haven’t noticed! This is not to say that you look different and don’t enjoy some of the things that people in the world do. Yet, your trust is not in your abilities, possessions, and income, but in him who gives it freely to you by grace.

2. Jesus puts it another way when he says in verse 36 when he says: “For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? For what can a man give in return for his life?” I believe that you know the answers to those questions. Life now is not worth exchanging with eternity as the end of our text points out. As the end of our text points out. Yet there are those who claim to be Christians who do that. They think that they have

plenty of time; of course none of us knows that for sure. Living with Christ and for him is our top priority now and always. St. Paul says: “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20) Death to life was the way of your Savior and it is your way as well.

II.

A.1. While our text asks the question as to who Jesus is, it also asks us what it means to be a disciple of his. There are gurus, teachers, and leaders of various types who have disciples. They have a life style, a philosophy or method that has amassed a following. People like what they say, they attempt to emulate them and hang on their every word.

Following Jesus has to do with servant hood. Jesus comments about following do away with worldly success. He is talking of losing for the sake of winning. What Jesus is talking about in verse 34 is not a three step process: deny take up your cross and follow. Rather these are three descriptions of the same thing. As we follow Jesus, all these are part of our lives.

2. Denying is really about our conversion that is what the word really means. It doesn't mean that we don't enjoy anything anymore, but rather that Jesus is the most important object of our lives. Jesus talked about the cross. We hear that term often in Christian circles. It does not mean sickness or suffering. You bear the cross when you have struggles and ridicule in your life as a Christian.

The other morning I was reading a devotion that was entitled, “Not Only the Pulpit Preaches”. The author commented: “To know people in whom the victorious power of faith in Christ is manifested in the midst of grievous suffering and in the face of death-these are the most powerful sermons we can ever hear. Through this kind of testimony the church makes its mightiest witness.

B.1. The message of the gospel is all about life. Jesus has given his life for us that we can be assured of life forever with him. Jesus calls us to follow and makes our following possible. He says: “But whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels will save it.” There is no need for uncertainty in our lives regarding our salvation. Jesus Christ has accomplished everything that is necessary.

In verse 38, Jesus elaborates: “For whoever is ashamed of me and my words in the adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.” If we do not acknowledge Jesus, he will not acknowledge us either. Of course, the opposite is also true. In St. Matthew’s gospel we read: “Whoever acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge him before my Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 10:32)

2. Living in God’s kingdom is about service and following. It is not about the type of sanctuary we have, the successful programs we operate or how full the pews are. These are all wonderful blessings from the hand of God. If we don’t have them it does not mean that God is not blessing us. These may be things we set as goals for ourselves because God is interested in the souls of all people and wants them to be saved. Certainly a building erected the glory of God honors him.

Several years ago, I was doing some work at the seminary in St. Louis. In chapel that day I heard a sermon on true success in the ministry. The professor stated that it was not due to numbers, power or success, but solely to the grace of God. That is following in the way that Jesus Christ has called and enabled us to follow as we share the message of salvation and enjoy his blessings.

The world attempts to dictate to our faith and what it thinks it should be like. It was true in the various views about Jesus in our text and it is true regarding opinions regarding him today. Scripture tells you what he has done for you and continues to do for you in your lives today. It is a faith that goes beyond worldly expectations and sometimes even ours. It is that way because of the suffering, life, death, and resurrection of your Savior Jesus Christ who came for you and calls you to him as his very own. Amen.

