

Lent 2, February 28, 2021 Mark 8:31-35

Defining Moment – Rise to challenge or test of ability, character or faith

Will we excel under pressure/pass test with flying colours?

Or will we cave in under pressure, give in and fail?

Good: Tom Brady vs. Patrick Mahomes in Super Bowl

Bad: Trump/Guliani in last year's election and run-up and follow-up

Bible: Abraham/David/Peter/Jesus

How have/do/will we respond to our defining moments?

How will we be remembered? And for what?

“Son of Man MUST undergo suffering” - “Must” in Greek means “it is necessary”

Thus, just as he suffered, not for his sake but for ours, so “it is necessary”

that we are called to suffer, not for our sakes, but for his. . .

to share, with him, his death and resurrection

to share, from him, the gift of his grace

Not about us garnering sympathy or admiration or brownie points with God

Not about us and our notion of “salvation by self-sacrifice” --

(that is, “I can smell burning martyr way over here. . .”)--

but rather to bear witness to our salvation given us as a gift—

a gift of love bought and paid for with his life

“If anyone wants to become my followers, let them deny themselves,

take up their cross and follow me”. . .

in order to share his suffering, death and resurrection

Cross-bearing: Be ready and willing to do the right thing at the right time

“Never the wrong time to do the right thing”

Discover. . .or reveal. . .what we are made of. . .what we believe. . .

what we base our lives on. . .what our faith is founded on

4 responses to this call to “do what is right” . . .

to do and be what we are called to do and be

1. Never think -- that is, not to turn our backs to what is set before us. . .
and therefore refuse to do what is right. . .
even if and, especially when, we know it is the right thing to do
 - Me - Embarrassed/ashamed of past acts or words– cowardly/thoughtless
Grateful for opportunities given to me for redemption
 - Soldier on grenade/woman saves child from bus/
passerby rescues someone from a burning car
and risks one’s own life for a complete stranger
 - Never really think about what needs or should be done. . .
or who should or would do it (whose job it is to do it)
but simply do what is right instinctively
 - “Those who lose their life for my sake. . .will save it”
2. Overthink - Try to avoid doing what is right. . .for any number of reasons
 - Too complicated/implications/risks/costs/not worth it. . .
probably won’t make any difference anyway
 - “Paralysis by analysis”
 - Story of Tony Gythiel – Hard to know what is right
and can’t even always be sure what is right
 - What we do know, though, is: “Want to save their life will lose it”
3. Too Eager - Ignatius (martyred in Rome, July 6, 108 CE)
 - “Fools rush in where angels fear to tread”
 - Lord, preserve us from saints (holier-than-thou)
and from sinners (Trump. . .and me) . . .who are dead certain
they know what is best/right for themselves
and for everyone else. . . and woe to those who disagree
 - All about ego/our needs and desires. . .and not what others need
 - “Setting your mind not on divine things but on human things”

4. Be ready - Not blind to realities but not paralyzed by doubt or fear or worry and therefore unable/unwilling to respond

- Not immune to fear/worry but courage in face of fear

- Not disregard possible hurts/damage/offence to others but personal integrity/conviction requires action

- Jesus: Not overly-eager (not merely a difficult weekend)

Not overly-fearful – “Set his face like flint”

Not consumed with personal fate but with faithfulness/obedience to call

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me”

“Want to become my followers? Then, follow me”. (Well, duh!)

Need to read what is hidden/obvious-but-overlooked-unwanted:

“Take up their cross”

Cross-bearing is not about putting up with a disability or a grumpy spouse or a recalcitrant child or a petty inconvenience

Instead, “taking up a cross and following Jesus” requires:

Vision to see what is right; wisdom to understand the price;

Faith to trust that we are not alone;

Courage to go ahead

When people I know—whether church leaders or members—when I have encouraged people who were tested-- in long-ago or recent past, who have thought, prayed and then acted: Such people made me incredibly proud. . . and, more important, I believe, made Jesus proud

Can't make specific application for you

May be how one bears witness to their faith through how they face A serious illness. . .or an impending death. . .or a terrible loss and how we overcome. . .or cope with. . .such tragedies

Might be being asked or called by Christ, either personally
or as a community of believers, to do something we don't want to do
even though we are pretty sure it is the right things to do. . .
because doing it will demand a price from us
that we don't want to pay

Don't know what defining moment will be nor when, why or how it will come
to us or for us personally and for us as a congregation

But what I do know is that what will happen to us or be asked of us
is not going to be something we want to happen. . .
in the sense of trying to hold on to the past or the present—
whether that is what it “used to be like” or even what it is like now

It will not be what we want to do in terms of saving ourselves,
protecting ourselves or preserving ourselves--
and will not be what we want when it comes to
saving or preserving our lives,
not only the way we were or are. . .
or even the way we want things to turn out

If we seek that—seek to hold firmly on to life as it was or even is. . .
then we will lose our live. . .our very reason for being--
which is to take the risk of giving our lives away,
giving ourselves away, to and for the world—
for if and when we lose that,
then we will lose everything that really matters

But if. . .or, better, when. . .or even better, because—
because we stand ready and willing to lose what we have
for his sake. . .for the sake of the gospel. . .
in answer to his call to us to do so,
then we can be sure that we will find our new life and new lives in him

For that reason, for those reasons, we need to cling to the cross. . .
to the death/resurrection of Jesus. . .
where we find the very things we need so much:

Forgiveness for our failures/weaknesses/rashness. . .and for our shame
Freedom to rise again and begin again
Courage and Peace: Courage to respond as best as we can
(not, perhaps, as we ought but as we are able)
and with that courage comes a sense of Peace
with those decisions and actions

All of these—forgiveness, freedom, courage and peace—
come with assurance of God’s presence
and we find and receive these needs and gifts in this meal

So, come, accept, rejoice in and be grateful
for what Christ offers in bread and wine
and then let us all—individually and together—
let us all hear his call and answer it:
“Take up your cross and follow me”
Come with me. . .and I promise,
You won’t regret it. . .or forget it!

Amen.

SDG