**9/15/24**

**Puzzle & Pieces**

**Mark 8:27-38 (NRSV)**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:2, NRSV) (2) **Amen.**

Good morning and welcome to all of you out there in the pews and out there on our conference call. I am glad that you all have decided to join us yet again today, because we actually have some work and exploration to do right here in this community. I of course am not the only one who comes here to work each Sunday, you all do as well, as you allow your hearts and minds to be opened to explore and figure things out in your personal faith walks. So, if you really let that Gospel Reading from a few short moments ago sink in then you might have come to grasp that there is some stuff to really unpack and consider. There is also some stuff that we need to take a look at from an alternative perspective, and that position of course would require us to put ourselves in the very sandals of the folks back then. That is precisely how we live out the very message we hear and read folks. Through that we actually get a chance to experience the vital puzzle pieces being put into place as the entire story unraveled and unveiled itself to Peter and the disciples back then, and how it does so for us today as well.

 Considering that, I will admit that there were several different routes I could have chosen to go at here with you this morning. Believe it or not, I actually had several of my own puzzles already constructed. One of those was the very sermon that I delivered not too long ago at the tail end of February during our Lenten season this very year. However, on that particular day the first four verses were actually excluded from our Gospel Reading then. So, that right there had me realize that I was looking at things from a different perspective, and that puzzle despite being completed, was not really helpful for today’s message. Then, there were two more completed puzzles in my sermon archive. There was my sermon from 2015, you know back in the day when I used to pace up and down that center aisle right there. That one gave me a few key points, but was still a different puzzle than the one I wanted to put together with you all today. Then, there was my sermon from 2016 that I delivered while preaching over at Beadle Memorial Presbyterian Church in Cape May Point. That one also gave me a few key points, but it also was a different puzzle than the one I desired to put together with you all today as well. The puzzle I am making all efforts at putting together with you all today actually started to form itself while I was sitting at Pericope, or Pastoral Bible Study, this past Monday with our group. It was there that my mindset and focus was altered. That was precisely where the focus on things came to be about the very question that we heard in verse 29, “But who do you say that I am?” (2) That very question from Jesus is deep, and it is at the very heart of the matter in every one of our individual and personal faith walks as we build our very own relationships with our Triune God. That was not just a Peter or disciple question, and that was not just a question for way back then. It is a question that is real and alive to this very day! It is a question we have all already managed to form an answer for undoubtedly, but I am also sure through our continued work and exploration that answer actually continues to evolve too.

So, since Monday on I have been thinking about it on and off. I have been tossing it about as one might do with puzzle pieces, as I worked through various research and other things related to this Gospel Reading. I have even been looking at it overall in regards to my life and my walk of faith and the relationship I have been building with our Triune God over these past 42 some years. In my efforts of building a good puzzle for today I also realized that I had to dip back into the well of poetry, and I had to pay a little homage to Pastor Leah, and her thoughts on how I often preached and read during our Worship Services. So, let us start constructing our puzzle a little bit more here together while focusing on the very question we heard from Jeus in verse 29, as I offer you the poem entitled, Who Do You Say I Am by Raymond A. Foss.

“What a question, what a test

putting it on the line, with him right there

in your face, after the miracles, the lessons

wanting a mighty savior, a king to rule

overthrow the yoke, the oppression of the age

the force of Rome, over the land of his ancestors

the promised land, of the chosen people

First, who do they say I am

then the pivotal question, the true test

of the rock, “who do you say I am?”

Oh, what a response, a prescience,

a certainty not found in other lines

other books, other verses

The Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One

(depending on the translation) (of course)

A moment of faith wrapped in a simple phrase,

a statement of belief

in Him, his calling, from God;

but timid still, holding back

ready for rebuke, in stark terms

“Get behind me Satan”

A stumbling block for his Messiah

keeping him from the destiny

the path he would walk

sharing the burden, the new yoke

after a slap to the face” (10)

That poem struck me out of all the stories and poems I reviewed for today. It was in this very poem, and in our Gospel Reading, that we get confirmation that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, but the journey is to the cross, and not one just of glory. We also even come to know that more through the various theologies and beliefs that Martin Luther would share with and for all of us throughout his lifetime. Then, we may have even come to hear this very message from the Pope this past week when he shared that ‘all religions are a path to God.’ (11) Some of you may have read that particular article in Crux, as it was also all over Facebook. Some of you may have also read that story because I chose to share it with you personally. This story about the Pope addressing the people in Singapore during his recent journeys has hit all kinds of mainstream media too. Now, some of you out there may have missed this story all together, or you might actually be out there shaking your head at this. You may have even in fact read some other articles that have called the Pope out for making something that could even be identified as a borderline heretical statement. What I am willing to go out on a limb and say is that I am not quite too sure that is the case though. I am also quite focused on the fact that we should be careful in our examination of this and other things as well. This actually might be the very essence and work that Martin Luther had set out to do in the first place, and that was to fix the church and the atrocities going on, and not to further split us despite that being what eventually occurred. If you really explore our Gospel Reading, the poem I offered, and this position from the Pope, and really allow your hearts and minds to be open, you might actually hear a subtle call for unity here.

What I happened to get from this article and the Pope’s talk was that he expressed and promoted people to open up dialogue, and that especially being children. In my mindset his focus was not actually on religion as most may perceive it to be, but it indeed was more focused on a mutual respect and love for our neighbors. Through this and open discussion we all are then allowed to explore our particular faith and beliefs, our own very personal relationships. That is where we as Christians come to realize that everything always will eventually point towards the cross just like Peter and the disciples would learn in our Gospel Reading today. That is precisely where all of these earthly religions and spiritual practices will fall, because at the foot of the cross is where we all will eventually end up! We do not need to defend our religion, but we need to release our faith and allow it to work in and through others. This is also precisely where Satan will indeed have no other choice but to get behind us, to get behind God, as we all really do take up our stance as children of God. However, we need to realize that all of the puzzle pieces are vitally important in connecting the entire story and creating the very picture that will be sitting in front of each and every one us. This is also too where we come to realize that we cannot live out a part of the story, and only want the glory, but we need to live out the entire story and get to the cross. We cannot have a part of the puzzle, and not put the rest of the pieces in. We always have a desire to complete it once it is out of the box. We need to unleash our faith in this very same way. We need to let it out of the proverbial box that it always seems to get stuffed back into, and we need to move all the proverbial puzzle pieces about and work together in unity to create the picture. When that picture and puzzle are completed we as Christians believe and know that without that very so-called symbol of destruction and pain we would not have the very life we receive in our baptisms through the Messiah! In my mind the Pope was actually acting out our very Gospel Reading today in real life. He was saying exactly who he feels the Messiah to be, and how our Triune God will affect all of our hearts and minds over time through open discussion, dialogue, and exploration. The truth will eventually come to the forefront. Now, you of course can feel free to debate me on this matter, but this is the stance I am going to stick with.

Through and in this very discussion I urge you to take a look at yourselves, and who we all are called to be. This is precisely where we get to ask of ourselves that very same question from verse 29, “But who do you say that I am?” (2) For if we are truly called to go out there and show others with our actions and our words what it is to be like Christ, then that is precisely what we should do. That is our call and our commission to deliver the Messiah to others. Christ lives in and through each and every one of us. He did not die on that cross, and he did not rise from that slumber in that tomb three days later for no reason. He did so because that is and was what the scriptures said would happen. We get to live those very scriptures out each and every day as well. The only difference is we do not have to be quiet about it because the story is still unfolding like it was back in that time frame. This is also where we come to realize that “A Lutheran gift to the Christian faith is the articulation of the Theology of the Cross. Life as a Christian will have pain and suffering but in the midst of that pain, we will find Jesus suffering with us and walking with us through our pain to resurrection on the other side. It is the midst of pain that we experience Jesus most acutely-- where our faith grows stronger.” (9) That is precisely who we come to know and identify together, as we answer the very question from verse 29 today. That is precisely how we come to construct our very puzzle together in this community of believers and answer the question individually and together of, “But who do you say that I am?” (2) Let us not be puzzled, but let us construct it for ourselves and others and bring things into a full picture!

Amen and Amen.

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 Pope in multi-faith Singapore says ‘all religions are a path to God’

 By Elise Ann Allen

 Sep 13, 2024

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 singapore-says-all-religions-are-a-path-to-god

**Mark 8:27-38 (NRSV)**

 This story provides the turning point in Mark’s gospel. Peter is the first human

 being in the narrative to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah, but he cannot

 accept that as the Messiah Jesus will have to suffer. Moreover, Jesus issues a

 strong challenge to all by connecting discipleship and the cross.

 27Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the

 way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” 28And they

 answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the

 prophets.” 29He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered

 him, “You are the Messiah.” 30And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone

 about him.

 31Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great

 suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be

 killed, and after three days rise again. 32He said all this quite openly. And Peter

 took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33But turning and looking at his

 disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting

 your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

 34He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to

 become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and

 follow me. 35For 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. 36For what will it

 profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? 37Indeed, what can they

 give in return for their life? 38Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in

 this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be

 ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

**Theme Statement: What is God doing in or behind this text?**

**(Active verb, saving or empowering action, complete thought, and a simple short sentence)**

Jesus is indeed the Messiah, but the journey is to the cross, and not one just of glory.

**Four Page Method**

**Page One (Trouble in the Text) (Characters Only)**

They were setting their minds on human and earthly things, and not divine things.

**Page Two (Trouble in the World) (Us Only)**

We are setting our minds on human and earthly things, and not divine things.

**Page Three (Grace in the Text) (God & Characters)**

Denial of self, and taking up the cross, is the true path to life for the disciples.

**Page Four (Grace in the World) (God & Us)**

Denial of self, and taking up the cross, is the true path to life for you and I.

**Sermon Unity Elements: The Tiny Dog Now Is Mine**

**Text (41-42):** Mark 8:27-38 (NRSV)

**Theme (42-48):** The Messiah

**Doctrine (48-50):** Salvation

**Need (50-52):** Honest Truth

**Image (52-56):** The Cross

**Mission (56-57):** To live out and experience scripture, and share it with others.