

Although both of them have been given credit, it was neither Abraham Lincoln, nor Mark Twain who first said, “It is better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and remove all doubt.” And it clearly was not the apostle Peter, either. We don’t know whether Peter was more or less astute than the other eleven disciples, but he was more willing to go out on a limb—or out of a boat. Sometimes he got it right, like in last week’s gospel, when Jesus asked *Who do you say I am?* and Peter answered, *You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.* But at least as often, he got it wrong, including in today’s passage where he argues with Jesus over what it really means that Jesus is the Messiah.

After Peter’s confession of Jesus’ identity, Jesus instructs the disciples not to tell anyone that he is the Messiah; but privately, he begins to prepare them for the inevitability of the cross. A couple Lents ago we looked at different theories of soteriology, that is, how Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection accomplished our salvation. There are different ways to explain spiritually *why* Jesus ended up on the cross, but historically *how* he ended up there was by inciting a popular movement that, though peaceful, challenged the religious establishment and the status quo. It was easy for his adversaries to portray him as a threat to government authority. Jesus knows if he keeps doing the work that God has sent him to do, he’s going to end up paying for it with his life. He does not want the disciples to be surprised by this.

But we can hardly blame Peter for pushing back. Nobody wants those they love to suffer and die, as Jesus predicts. Think about how hard it is when a friend or family member shares a scary diagnosis or other news that will change their life for the worse; isn’t our first instinct to say, *No! That can’t be!*? Surely part of Peter’s response comes from that place of empathy and compassion. But also, Peter has just identified Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the living God, and wouldn’t he think that the perks of being the Messiah and the Son of God would be *not* ever having to suffer, *not* being treated unjustly by the elders and priests, certainly *not* being killed...If Peter was right about who Jesus was—and Jesus assured Peter that his confession was indeed divinely inspired—then how could these things happen to the man who was not only his friend and teacher, but also his savior and Lord? And though Matthew doesn’t spell this out for us, Peter may have been concerned, and if so, rightly so, that the suffering in Jesus’ near future would be the fate of those who followed Jesus as well.

Jesus' reaction is...intense: *Get behind me Satan*. Depending on where you're reading in scripture Satan is the one who tempts or the one who argues. Jesus doesn't need an argument—he knows who he is and what he's going to have to do. And he doesn't need temptation: the road to the cross and the cross itself are hard enough to bear without Peter or anyone else giving him false hope of avoiding that fate. Jesus explains how Peter has misunderstood: *You are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things*.

Faithful Christian discipleship depends on the shift in perspective that Jesus requires of Peter here: setting our minds on divine things, not on human things. Peter assumes that, as the Son of God, Jesus—and maybe by proximity, Jesus' 12 closest buddies—will enjoy the power and glory and majesty that belong to God. If Jesus can wield the power of God to heal and feed others, wouldn't he use it to avoid hardship and suffering himself, and maybe to pursue or at least maintain the highest station he can? But what Peter did not understand is that instead of Jesus playing the God card to avoid suffering and death, God came, in the person of Jesus, to participate in the full depth and breadth of the human experience, including suffering and death. When we say that God did not spare his only son...that still doesn't quite get at what happened. God did not spare God's own self: God *volunteered* to suffer the worst that humanity could do in solidarity with, and in pursuit, of all of us.

So if we want to be faithful followers of Jesus—any of us who wish to come after him—we should follow without expecting power and honor, even though power and honor belong to our God. Following Jesus means giving over our lives in the service of others, because that's what Jesus did. Fortunately for us, losing our lives for Jesus' sake is likely going to manifest as more of a metaphorical thing; we live in a place and time where the practice of our Christian faith is not only permitted but privileged. Many of the first disciples took up literal crosses, but nobody is asking that of us. Instead, in our modern context, we look for the ways in which we can use our lives—our opportunities, advantages, abilities, positions, and resources—for the sake of others instead of saving everything we are and everything we have for ourselves. Dolly may have understood that better than Saint Peter. We may not be in danger of losing our physical lives as martyrs for Jesus, but we all will lose this life one day. What will we have done with it?