

***May we be Willing to be Called to Task:***

***O LORD, Hear our prayer***

A Sermon By  
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Second Sunday in Lent

Mark 8: 31-38

Saint Andrew's Episcopal Church  
Lawton, Oklahoma

## **May we be Willing to be Called to Task:**

### **O LORD, Hear our prayer**

In addition to reflecting on the *Daily Reflection Questions* from the *Home Devotion* Guide that arrived in your mailbox last week, I hope you've had time to read reflections on the daily questions written by our very own members of Saint Andrew's over the past week and a half.

The reflection questions so far have centered on noticing where God is in our lives in a more internal manner. They've been a gentle entry into a Lenten discipline. The questions for the coming few weeks turn our attention to finding where God is already moving around us – in our neighborhood, school, work, church, and family. Looking for the joy and the concern in these places and people and how at times forces within each of us can holdback God's grace if we are unwilling to "repent and turn the Lord." As we journey through Lent with these reflection questions they will soon be "calling us to task."

Our gospel this morning doesn't wait for us to arrive at these more pointed reflection questions (the confessions from the Litany of Penitence didn't really either for that matter). No, our gospel is already there "calling us to task," and if I'm honest, my internal reaction hearing this from my comfortable 21<sup>st</sup> century vantage point is yikes :-/ !!

The phrase, "Comfort the afflicted, afflict the comfortable" jumps to mind!

There is a clear element of where we are headed folks --- like it or not (Peter)!

After teaching them "that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering" leading to his death and resurrection, Jesus says to Peter – "*Get behind me Satan!*"<sup>1</sup>

Not that this was God's mission, that Jesus must die for us individually, rather it appears "Jesus "must" die because his commitment to human healing" particularly of the broken and the outcast "will not falter," <sup>2</sup> which Mark has already pretty clearly outlined in the first 8 chapters of his gospel.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 8: 33b

<sup>2</sup> Driggers, Ira Brent. "Commentary on Mark 8:31-38." *Working Preacher from Luther Seminary*, [www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/second-sunday-in-lent-2/commentary-on-mark-831-38-5](http://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/second-sunday-in-lent-2/commentary-on-mark-831-38-5).

This Messiah is not going to be anything like what had lived in the imaginations of the Israelites.

*"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. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?"*<sup>3</sup>

What is this about?!

He's diving deep, all in. I get the impression Jesus is not interested in platitudes or niceties. The meme I've seen floating around FaceBook the past few months comes to mind, "God Doesn't Care how many verses of the Bible you've memorized, God cares about how you treat people" especially the broken and the outcast. The disciples and all those gathered in the crowd, are being called to task! "Get behind me Satan!"

Talk about being "called to task!"

Using the standard dating of Mark's gospel of 70 CE, it is likely those in the audience listening knew of the martyrdom of the Apostle James in 42- 44 CE and perhaps the martyrdom of the Apostle Peter in 64 CE. The personal stories of those who had denied themselves and taken up their cross, being willing to "lose their life for my sake, and the sake of the gospel"<sup>4</sup> were likely in the early imagination of these early followers of Christ.

Notice I didn't call these early martyr's Christians, that term came at least a hundred years later, after the followers of Christ had taken their shared experience of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection caring on Jesus' unfaltering commitment of "human healing" particularly of the broken and the outcast. There seems to be general agreement this part of Jesus' message, but his divinity, path to salvation, how Gentiles become a part of restored world, those appear to be more complex questions of differing understandings depending on which apostle you encountered.

And so it remains today, just as early Christians did not have a unified understanding of who Jesus was, there are over 300 denominations in our world today.

And we find ourselves in the postmodern age as experienced in America one of which markers is the "decline of Christianity." I don't think of it as a decline

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<sup>3</sup> Mark 8: 35-6

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

necessarily, I tend to think of it more as a kind of “keeping it real” check, an element of making sure we, as the Church, aren’t behaving as if we are entitled – much like the Jewish authorities during Jesus’ day and much like took place during the Reformation when the people finally had enough of the financial abuses of the Roman Catholic Church’s demand to pay for indulgences to ensure entry into heaven. Is it that we are in the “Decline of Christianity,” or are we in the middle of “the Church’s” “every 500-year garage,” sale as church historian and theologian Phyllis Tickle puts it, or are we simply in the crucible of discovering what awaits our Christian tradition for the next 500-years? However, you think of it, or however you refer to it, Christianity is certainly being “called to task” by Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, Gen Z and beyond who generally have little use for “talking the talk but not walking the walk.”

And I get it, it’s a reasonable response to the history of abuse of power in the church and the perception that much of going to church during the 20<sup>th</sup> century was proforma.

But I do have some hope!!

If we as a “church” are willing and responsive to being “called to task” in our own day, of finding new, responsive, and relevant ways to bring to life and “human healing” particularly with the broken and the outcast – this sort of caring community does not go unnoticed. In fact, people flock to it, people desperately want to be a part of bringing hope and new life into the world.

It will likely require us being called to task, to considering that there might be a need directly in front of us as a church community that will require trying something new or calming a worry or fear, this in and of itself is a form of “losing our lives” in order to save it because out of losing is an opening for growth, for expansion, for opportunity, for new life and in that mix we are saved.

As we continue to live into this crucible of discovery may we tune our hearts and minds to truly hear the ways we are called to lose our lives for Jesus’ sake and for the sake of the gospel in order to save it. O Lord, hear our prayer. Amen.