

Sermon for Sunday, March 8, 2009

Second Sunday in Lent

By Tim Ljunggren

First Lesson Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

Psalm 22:22-30

Second Lesson Romans 4:13-25

Gospel Mark 8:31-38

In today's gospel lesson, Jesus talks about ministry.

First, before we go any further, let's do an exercise, shall we?

In your pews are some blank index cards along with some pens; I'd like each of you to take an index card and write down the ten characteristics of a good minister. For example, I would write down "compassion" as being one of the key characteristics of a good minister, and you can certainly use that as one of your own. So, write down nine other characteristics that come to mind when you think about what constitutes a good minister. ...

Before we get to those cards you just filled out, let's take a closer look at this Sunday's gospel lesson.

Jesus was very, very clear about ministry—he had definite ideas about not only what was expected of him, but what he expected of others as well.

In the passage that we heard from Mark, Jesus openly talks about what's going to happen to him: "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." To his disciples, these words came as a shock; the followers of Jesus were looking to him and his ministry as a way to escape the harsh conditions they found themselves in. To them, the Messiah was one who would destroy those who sought Israel's own destruction and demise, a Warrior/Lord who would smite and cut down those who would dare oppress God's people.

Jesus saw his ministry just a little bit different.

After hearing Jesus' words about himself and his ministry, Peter takes it upon himself to have a little chat with Jesus in private—indeed, Peter rebuked Jesus for his words, and scolded him for not fitting precisely into the mold that Peter cast Jesus into—a role that bore no resemblance to the ministry that Jesus knew he had to live into.

How quickly are we to rebuke others about their ministries? How quickly are we to point fingers at others when they don't live up to our expectations? How quickly do we focus on the ministries of others, while ignoring our own?

Just who are ministers?

Jesus reminded Peter—and us—that we need to concentrate on our own ministry when he told his disciples: “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

Ministry is not about pointing out the faults of others, just as Peter did to Jesus. Rather, ministry is all about looking at ourselves and deciding if we're really willing to take up our crosses and follow Jesus.

Take out those index cards that you wrote on—what do you see?

Those ten characteristics of a good minister—they're not characteristics written for someone else. They're *your* characteristics. They make up what you believe you should be doing as a minister of Christ, choosing to take up your own cross this Lenten season and follow Jesus.

Take a look at page 855 in the Book of Common Prayer. ...

Who are the ministers of the Church?

Lay persons, bishops, priests, and deacons.

Which pretty much includes everyone here today, doesn't it?

We are all ministers of Christ—we are all a part of that royal priesthood that begs us to take our roles as ministers very, very seriously. Yet, the choice is always ours, isn't it? We can choose not to look at ourselves as ministers and be like Peter in today's gospel lesson: more concerned with our own views of what other

people's ministries should look like, rather than taking up our crosses and follow Jesus.

We're not inclined to take up our cross, nor even watch someone else do it, without arguing about motives. But this is the call of the Lord, pressed upon us especially during this season of Lent. This is true Lenten penance—not giving up something, but taking something on.

What crosses are you capable of assuming this holy season? What can you willingly do, without thought of personal reward or even satisfaction, but also without regard for the criticism or misunderstanding that may be generated among your family, friends, and even your fellow parishioners? How can you live into those ten characteristics that you wrote down this morning?

Jesus is waiting for your answer. ...

Amen. ...

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