

# Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Gospel Year B

## God Returns Our Shame with Mercy

Mark 8:27-38

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Analysis by Peter Keyel

*27 Jesus 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?" 28 And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." 29 He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." 30 And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.*

*31 Then 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. 32 He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 But 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."*

*34 He 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. 35 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. 36 For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? 37 Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? 38*

*Those 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.”*



“In the face of our best efforts to tell God how to be God, God is busy transforming our lives. When that faith we can’t earn is created in us, then we start moving in a different direction.”

## **DIAGNOSIS: Failing to Follow Jesus**

### ***Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Failing to Become a Disciple***

Peter and the other disciples know who Jesus is: he is the Messiah. They’re following him because they know that, and they’re right about that. However, in trying to be disciples,

they also get so much wrong. Disciples defend and show loyalty to their master. Yet when Peter gets upset because his master—whom he believes to be the saving Messiah—announces that he will be tortured, rejected, and murdered, Peter is rebuked. Apparently, Peter is failing at the discipleship game. Jesus' prescient words makes that clear—Peter must deny himself, risking humiliation and tortuous death, in addition with following Jesus.

Failed disciples? How many Christians believe that God or Jesus couldn't possibly be about something harsh because "God is love"? How often in our zeal to be good Christians do we dismiss God's words of judgment because we don't like where they lead?

### ***Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Ashamed of Jesus***

The problem is that being tortured and rejected by the religious elite is shameful. Masters should not experience such misery. Peter is being expected to face his worst fears, risk certain death, and stand by Jesus when it counts. We know that Peter will be too ashamed to do this; he will deny Jesus not once, not twice, but three times in the night in which he is arrested. We can only speculate about whether Peter already knew in his heart during this conversation that this was a likely outcome. What we do know is that Peter's heart led him to try to defend the Jesus he wanted to follow against the Jesus who stood before him.

Like Peter, our failures are more than just getting the game wrong. Even if we mean well, our hearts are not in the right place. We are trying to tell God how to act, and what to be, and we have completely forgotten that isn't our place.

### ***Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Following Satan***

Those who can't stand for the truth, despite these consequences (e.g., ashamed of Jesus and of his words), have no place in the

Kingdom. Those in rebellion against God also have no place. When Peter tries to tell Jesus he has the whole Messiah thing wrong, he is putting himself in the place of God. And, as if being called “Satan” directly by Jesus isn’t bad enough, Jesus calls together all the disciples and the crowds to tell them indirectly that indeed 1) Jesus is the Messiah, and 2) Jesus is ashamed of Peter. Peter may well have wanted to crawl off and die.

Being ashamed of God’s words, even when they are uncomfortable, is an act of rebellion against God because we are telling God how to act. We have completely forgotten our place, and we’re now on the wrong, quite deadly, side of God. If we got on that side, how can we ever get back to being right with God?

## **PROGNOSIS: Jesus Carries Us Through**



### ***Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Jesus in the Lead***

Jesus’ suffering and death is precisely on account of those he

is ashamed of. Out of mercy, God raises Jesus from the dead. Then, the Son of Man comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels. That glory is God declaring an end to our rebellion.

We get back to being right with God because God is NOT ashamed of Jesus and shows us through the resurrection that we are promised Jesus' righteousness.

***Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Unashamed***

What is the change for Peter? In this pericope, we don't get Peter's reaction, much less a clue about what is in his heart. However, Mark 9 gives us a few hints. Jesus says that Peter will witness the resurrection and/or Pentecost. It then moves to the Transfiguration, where Peter is chosen to go up the mountain with Jesus. God is busy creating that faith in Peter, and God is unashamed of that creation.

In the face of our best efforts to tell God how to be God, God is busy transforming our lives. When that faith we can't earn is created in us, then we start moving in a different direction.

***Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Being a Disciple***

We know how the story fully plays out with Peter. After Jesus' death and resurrection, Peter helps build the early church and boldly proclaims the news he had earlier chastened Jesus over. Peter does eventually lose his life for the sake of the gospel.

We don't know yet how our lives will play out. However, we are freed to live in the trust that God will have mercy on us. We are freed to follow to follow Jesus, even take up a cross and lose our lives for it. We are free to live unashamed of our pasts and unashamed of the Messiah we follow.