

Second Sunday in Lent, Gospel Year B

Failed Messiah FTW

Mark 8:31-38

Second Sunday in Lent

Analysis by Peter Keyel

31 Then [Jesus] 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."

Author's Note: In the title, "FTW" means "for the win."



DIAGNOSIS: Worldly Success Is Temporary

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Gaining the World

This passage immediately follows Peter's confession that Jesus is the Messiah. A messiah, by definition, is successful. Even if the expectation may not be for wealth and fame in the secular world, at least the religious elders, the chief priests, and the other holy people should recognize him as such. But Jesus says that is not what is going to happen. Jesus is going to do this messiah thing all wrong because he's going to be rejected and killed. After Peter's confusion on this subject, Jesus calls out the entire crowd, pointing out that worldly success relies on what we might call a theology of glory: God loves winners, and winning is proof God loves you.

We all want to be successful, whether that is as ambitious as gaining the whole world, gaining only one small part, or even just priding ourselves on not being ashamed of Jesus or his words and/or following the correct theology.

Step 2: Advance Diagnosis (Internal Problem) Mind Set on Human Things

Peter's expectations for a messiah and the crowd's expectations for worldly success rely on a fundamentally problematic mindset: Our minds are set on worldly things (survival, success), not on the divine. Can you really blame the crowd or Peter for wanting to survive and succeed?

Setting our minds on success, or even survival sets our mind inevitably on the Law. There are things that we must do, or else we face shame, loss, or even death. We want to be good at something. It's only human.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Losing Life

Jesus points out the key problems to setting our minds on our hopes of survival: we all die. No matter what we do to gain the world, our lives will be forfeit. We don't have anything we can give in exchange for eternal life. To Peter, Jesus makes it even more clear that Peter's idea that a messiah should be respected by the chief priests, elders, and holy people, and not be beaten and killed is in direct opposition to God. Not much of a messianic win there, it seems.

If following God gets us killed, that means we will fail at success and survival. Why bother with God anyways, if we're just going to die? If it's satanic for a messiah to be popular and survive, maybe we should be in rebellion against God. Of course, not following God still means we die. What hope do we have?

PROGNOSIS: Jesus' Success Is Eternal



Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Giving Life

What gets lost in our concern over losing our lives or our messiahs losing theirs, is that Jesus also foretells his resurrection. He will succeed as a messiah precisely because he suffers and dies... and is raised by God on the third day. This is the hope we are given: that we will share in this resurrection with Jesus.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Mind Set on the Divine

This hope generates a new faith. Faith frees us from the need for success and the fears of dying. Our minds are no longer set on human things but on the divine. We can trust God through life and through death. What's more, when we no longer have our minds set on success, we can find God in the places where success

isn't. We can see a theology of the cross: our value (and others) is not in who we are, but in the Messiah's faithfulness in dying... and rising.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Taking up the Cross

What does this newfound faith mean for us? Jesus tells the crowd: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." Faith frees us to want to follow Jesus. We are freed to commit our lives, regardless of fame, money, success, failure, or problems. Since our value lies not in our successes, but in Jesus' faithfulness as Messiah, (and our neighbors' value does too), we can celebrate ourselves and our neighbor, regardless of who or what we or they are. We are freed to love and act accordingly. And even if our actions go so far as to get us killed, we know it's not the end.