

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost, Gospel, Year B

WHAT WE TRY TO KEEP, WE LOSE; WHAT WE GIVE TO JESUS, WE SAVE

Mark 8:27-38

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

Analysis by Timothy Hoyer

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

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

34He 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. 35For 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. 36For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their

life? 37Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?
38Those 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."



DIAGNOSIS: Use It or Lose It

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): We Must Save Our Lives

We experience many things in our lives—weather, different foods, jobs, people, sports, and many more. For each thing we experience, we have to decide whether or not it helps us, or whether it makes us feel good, or whether or not we like it. In other words, we decide whether or not each thing saves our lives. That is what we have to do—save our lives. So when we

are told of Jesus, does he or doesn't he help us save our lives? Does he do a better job of saving our lives than all those other things?

Standing in the cemetery at a gravesite, a daughter spoke of her father whose ashes were about to be buried. She told the people gathered a few stories of what she remembered the most about her father when she was a child. She also mentioned that because of him she got to meet many people, such as those gathered there at the gravesite. She said that a bit of her father is in each one of them and so will live on.

Peter decided Jesus helped him live. Peter called Jesus the Messiah.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): We Choose What Saves Our Life

Usually we decide quickly if something helps us live or not, if it makes us feel good or not, whether we like it or not. The things we decide give us life, we do them, buy them, use them, enjoy them, and depend on them for life. We trust them to give us life. Jesus, however? We are not so quick to decide about him. He is not fun, does not taste good, and there is no money in Jesus.

As the daughter spoke of her father and what he did, she never mentioned that he went to church most Sundays at different Lutheran congregations all his life, and took his children with him. She said nothing about his faith in Jesus, as if it had nothing to do with giving her father life, or her.

Jesus said that he, the Son of Man, the one Peter called Messiah, was going to undergo great suffering, be rejected, killed, and after three days rise again. Peter took Jesus aside to tell Jesus that suffering, being rejected, and killed would

not give him (Peter) life. If Jesus wanted to be called Messiah, he shouldn't talk of and do such things as suffering and dying. Such things did not give life, nor did Peter see the value of them.

Step 3: Advanced Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): What We Have Chosen to Save Us Fails Us

Jesus warns us that all the things we depend on to give us life will eventually only lead to us losing our life—which is to be cut off from God. For when we trust in things to give us life, we are not trusting God as our source of life, purpose, and meaning. We choose what gives us life, choosing between good and evil, making our judgments on all things. And as that daughter at the cemetery saw, all she relied on for life, all she spoke of as life-giving about her father, it all ended in death.

The daughter wanted her father to keep living, so she said he lived in the people he had met and helped and had been friends with. Yet they too will die, and all that is left of her father will die with them. There is no life, no eternal life, in being remembered by people.

Peter also chose other things than Jesus to give him life when he rebuked Jesus. He too died one day.

PROGNOSIS: Lose It to Have It

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Jesus Did Not Save His Life

Jesus did not save his life. He lost his life on a cross, making no objections. And three days later he rose again. Odd, but by losing his life he saved it.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Jesus Saves Our Life

Jesus gave his life in order to save our lives. As we hear that Jesus suffered, died, and rose again, the Holy Spirit gives us faith in Jesus. That is, the Spirit says that Jesus tastes good, that Jesus is good for us, that Jesus gives us life. Jesus is trust-worthy, will not fade, get old, or become ineffective. The life he gives us is everlasting life with him in his new resurrection creation. We can take up our death, not deny it, confess we are mortal, that all we depend on to give life will fail us. We have Jesus for life.

Step 6: Advanced Prognosis (External Solution): We Are Free to Lose

All the things we experience will still be judged by us whether we like them or not, but that's it, just like them. We don't use them to give us life, we don't count on them to make today good or makes us feel good. We trust Jesus for that. And we give his mercy and forgiveness to others so they may also trust him for life.