

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

AN OPEN SECRET

Mark 8:27-38

15th Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 19)

Analysis by Bruce Martin

Mark 8:27 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?" 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! 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: Losers!

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Ashamed of My Words*

Even after Jesus told them “quite openly” (v. 32), Jesus’ disciples, no differently than the crowds (v. 34), did not and could not understand that Jesus’ Messiah-mission (v. 29; in Greek: Christ, God’s anointed) required that he “must undergo great suffering . . . And be killed” (v. 31); and that “following” Jesus implies that they also “take up their cross” (v. 34). What Jesus said was as incomprehensible then as it is today: Love your enemies; forgive one another, not just up to seven times but relentlessly; God is more important than your family; I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; trust me! We, no less than they, are ashamed of losing everything, for his sake and the gospel’s (v. 35). There is no secret here to be deciphered, just plain talk that we don’t want.

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

As Jesus himself told it, we are ashamed not only of what he said, but of who he is; not only of the gospel but of the Christ. We who cannot comprehend the words of the Messiah/Christ do not even want to be associated with him. His suffering and death, we passionately believe, cannot help us in any way! His way is not our way; his truth is not our truth; his life is not our life. Hanging out with a dead man has no apparent future for us. No one can trust a crucified Messiah. We, at least, we are alive (for now); or so we believe.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Ashamed by Me*

By living our own truth our own way, we become ultimate losers. For, just as Jesus “rebuked” Peter (v. 33), our unbelief and

misplaced trust puts us in exactly the same plight as every Satan (v. 33): “ashamed” (a Hebraism for divine condemnation) by God and by his Christ in the final judgment (v. 38). Nor can we mount a defense by claiming that life and death are incommensurate, or that we are imperfect creatures of God’s own making. God himself says otherwise! This, too, is no secret to be deciphered, or to be deciphered away.

PROGNOSIS: Saved!

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Saved by the Ashamed*

Since we are ashamed of a crucified Messiah, it is inevitable that we should not believe that such a one could “rise again” (v. 31). And yet he did, proving by his own life that he is God’s Anointed One. And although, once again, we find it incomprehensible that God could love us in this way and save us (from God’s judgment) through the Ashamed One, Jesus’ resurrection from the dead says otherwise. Though we may theologize forever on it, but we will never understand it. Such is “the glory of the Father” (v. 38).

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Trusting in the Ashamed*

If the resurrection of Jesus is the key to unlocking the “secret” of his “great” suffering and death, it is a key that we ourselves cannot turn. If we are to trust in Jesus’ Messiah-mission executed on our behalf, and believe his words of promise, then the power to do so must be the same Power as Jesus’ resurrection, namely, the glory of the Father. To glory in the Ashamed One is to participate in the life of God. To trust in Jesus is to trust in God; to be resurrected into the life of God.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Proclaiming the Ashamed*

What is following Christ but to love our erstwhile enemies with the same love with which Christ loved us? Such trust in God and such love for others cannot exist without proclaiming its winning-by-losing "secret" to the world! Consequent to proclaiming the Ashamed One is necessarily to suffer and to die, not merely that suffering and death that the world will bring to us in its defense, but the daily struggle against our own ever-emerging mistrust and clinging to life. And yet, insofar as we are not ashamed of God's Messiah, or indeed of those for whom we are to die, or of the open secret we proclaim, neither will we be ashamed by God, the gospel, or the ones we have so loved.