



Sunday, February 28, 2021
Mark 8:31-38 (Second Sunday of Lent)

Pastor Chris Marien

Follow the Leader

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

There is a book in my daughter's room that tells the story of a group of children going on a visual bear hunt with their father. On the way, they encounter all sorts of obstacles they "can't go over and can't go under" but just have to "go through", and, luckily, they all make interesting noises. These obstacles include a field of long wavy grass (swishy swashy), a deep cold river (splash splash), a field of thick oozy mud (squelch squerch), a big dark forest (stumble trip!), a swirling whirling snowstorm (Hoooo woooo!) and finally a narrow gloomy cave (tiptoe! tiptoe!). As they approach each obstacle the same line is repeated...we're going on a bear hunt. We're going to catch a big one. What a beautiful day! We're not scared. Oh, oh grass. Long, wavy grass. We can't go over it. We can't go under it. Oh, no, we've got to go through it. Waiting for them in a cave is the last thing they expect to find. An actual bear! They all turn around and run out, having to make their way back through all the obstacles in reverse order, making all those funny noises again, but far more quickly and with the bear running after them, back to their front door and eventually into bed and under the covers with the determination never to go on a bear hunt again.

It would be easier for most of us, if we could simply run back home, jump into bed, and hide under the covers in this life – but this is not what God's call on our life offers to us. And this book has been an excellent reminder that often times, we simply have to go through whatever obstacles we find before us. Hardly ever does the decision to "go around a tough time" actually allow us to come out on the other side without being wounded in one way or another. The obstacles, whether created by circumstance or as a result of a decision we make, are often envisioned as too big to climb over and too difficult to work through – which means that for many of us there are moments where we simply get stuck unable to recognize or determine a way forward.

Today we hear the story of Jesus reprimanding Peter. Just three verses earlier, Peter is claiming Jesus as Messiah. And then as Jesus shares with his followers, that he will undergo great suffering, rejection, and even death – the disciples seem to elect Peter to speak what they are all thinking. Peter takes Jesus aside, and says, "Lord, you have it all wrong. Don't you get it? Your kingdom is not about suffering! It's not about death. We can't recruit to that! You won't fill the pews or meet the budget if you're preaching pain and rejection! Don't preach about the expectation of the Kingdom of God, or waiting for the Kingdom, just tell me that it's here now, and what great things I'll get out of the deal!"

And Jesus is quick to interrupt Peter, who speaks for the disciples and for us, and says to each of us in such a blunt fashion, "Get behind me Satan!" It seems as if Jesus is telling Peter and all of us that we are so far off base for what Jesus is about. And yet, as one author writes, "When we look more closely, I think there is something else here to be heard. This phrase, get behind me, is reminiscent of something else that is reoccurring in the gospels. Early in the story Jesus said, "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Then to the young rich man, "Go, sell all you have, give the money to the poor, and come and follow me." "Be my disciples." See, to be a disciple quite literally means to follow, or more specifically, to get behind.' I don't think Jesus is telling Peter, the disciples, and us, that we are being left behind, or abandoned. Rather, I think Jesus is putting us in our proper position, following the leader.

See, the problem with getting behind Christ and following Jesus where he leads, is that Jesus seems to lead me to places that I just really don't want to be. I want to so often be at home under the covers – right after I have

seen the bear. Yet, Jesus always seems determined to go where there is suffering, where there is much to fear, and rejection and death are certain. Jesus seems to always want to go where there are problems.

Wouldn't it be easier, if Jesus led us around the obstacles, so that we could hear the good news that the Kingdom of God has arrived and celebrate with Christ? And I'm given those moments! Make no doubt, there are days in which I see the promise of the Kingdom of God. And yet, every time I see the Kingdom, the call comes from our leader, "we're going on a bear hunt." We're going where the Kingdom, the hope of new life, the resurrection, are still being anticipated!"

Jesus leads us into deep unknowns of poverty, hunger, ignorance and addiction without an easy solution. What's more, Jesus refuses to let us walk blindly past. No doubt we've tried, and Christ has called out to us, "Get behind me! The Kingdom is headed over there, where there is still a deep hunger for hope and a way through!" That is God's promise to us – that the Kingdom Jesus calls us to is always through and almost never around – we simply do not have the time to go around – when the suffering of the world is so great. So instead of finding our own path in the wilderness moments, Jesus offers us a way through – if only we will follow. Here is what I will leave you with this day...I do not know the author, but I am caught by the reflection.

God won't ask you what kind of car you drove.

God will ask how many people you drove who did not have transportation.

God won't ask the square footage of your house.

God will ask how many people you welcomed into your home.

God won't ask about the clothes in your closet.

God will ask how many people you helped clothe.

God won't ask what your highest salary was.

God will ask if you compromised your character to obtain it.

God won't ask what your job title was.

God will ask if you performed your job to the best of your ability.

God won't ask how many friends you had.

God will ask how many people to whom you were a friend.

God won't ask you in what neighborhood you lived.

God will ask how you treated your neighbors.

And one more I would add...

God won't ask you how far you walked.

God will ask how far you followed. What will your answer be? Amen.