

What's It Worth to You?

[Text -Mark 8:27-37]

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The disciples, who have been following Jesus for some time, realize that there's something remarkably different in the way that he teaches, touches, and transforms the people around him. Jesus speaks with confident authority about Divine love and forgiveness; and he shows a deep commitment to reaching-out to the oppressed, and raising-up the downtrodden. By doing so, Jesus boldly challenges the status quo, and bravely confronts the powerful religious and political leaders of his day. There's definitely something extraordinary about Jesus, which prompts considerable conjecture about who he is.

Some are saying, "He's another John the Baptist - a challenger of the mighty and a champion of the meek!"

Others say, "He certainly displays the same qualities of the great prophets of old!"

There are even those who speculate that Jesus is Elijah himself - the ancient prophet who was whisked-away to heaven in a chariot of fire. and has now returned to drive-out the godless Roman oppressors!

And while all of this is extremely flattering, Jesus is less interested in public opinion than he is with the perceptions of those closest to him. So he asks his disciples, "Who do *you* say that I am?" Simon Peter answers, "You are the Messiah!" Now in that historical context, this is a stunning and sensational statement! To declare that Jesus is *The* Messiah [or in Greek, the *Christ*], is to claim that he's the One to whom John the Baptist, Elijah, and all the prophets of old were pointing - the fully Anointed Representative of the Holy One; the One who will usher-in a Divine Realm of everlasting justice and peace. And Jesus doesn't deny it! Instead, "he sternly orders them not to tell *anyone* about him!"

Now that's one weird twist! Jesus initiates this discussion about who he is; gets his disciples all fired-up about it; and then tells them to keep it quiet! No doubt, he has his reasons; and Simon Peter quickly reveals what one of those reasons might be. Like many people in First Century Israel, Peter, believes that the Messiah will come roaring-in like a ferocious lion of Judah - to devour the *bad* people [who were, of course, their enemies], and

deliver the *good* people [who were, of course, themselves]. But Jesus' understanding of his role as Messiah is completely different. Jesus comes, not to dramatically stir-up revolution in the streets, but to peacefully establish compassion in the hearts and lives of all people. And he recognizes that within *all* our hearts, there is both good and bad, faith and doubt, liberating love and debilitating fear.

Jesus chooses to trust in the Power of Divine Love to transform people's hearts and lives. Yet he knows that challenging and changing people with unconditional love, can be far more daring and dangerous than confronting them with sheer force. And he wants his followers to know the tremendous risks involved. So, "Jesus began to teach them that he [as the Son of Man - a human] must undergo great suffering...be rejected...and be *killed*, and after three days rise again. But Peter takes him aside and rebukes him: 'No, this can't happen to you!' So Jesus rebukes Peter, 'Get behind me Satan! For you are setting your mind, not on Divine things, but on human concerns.'"

Jesus is completely confident that trusting in Divine Love and Grace is the way to truly change people's lives; but Peter chooses to listen to his own doubts and fears. So Saint Peter behaves more like Satan - a tempter, who tries to pull Jesus away from that path of self-giving love, and onto the path of self-protecting fear. This doesn't mean that Peter is a bad person; it means that he is like every one of us, whenever we allow our fears to override our faith. For example, when you or I encounter someone in need, our willingness to get involved often depends upon whether we listen to our *fears*, or our *faith*. My fears tell me, "I *could* help this person, but that might put me at risk....I'd like to offer my support, but I've got my own problems to deal with....I've done this kind of thing before and have been badly burned - but not this time!" To the contrary, when I faithfully trust that my Divine Source is truly present, then I'll strive to be fully present with the person before me. When I have faith that any encounter I have contains a Divinely Positive Potential, I will take the risk of getting involved. When I remember that the Holy One has blessed me with far more than I need, then I will be gracious and generous with others.

You and I *can* listen to our fears - carefully guarding our time, our resources, and our lives. Unfortunately, by doing so, we miss-out on so much of Life, and Life's amazing possibilities. Our desire to not be "taken-in" by others, becomes our reality; as we shut ourselves off to those around

us - avoiding the risks, but missing the rewards of living fully and freely as faithful Children of the Holy One.

Jesus puts it this way: ‘Those who try to save [or hoard] their life will lose it; but those who lose their life for my sake - and for the sake of the *Gospel* [the *Good News*] - will find true life!’ For Jesus, these are much more than mere words. Jesus lives his life, and *gives* his life, trusting that the Divine Source of all Life is ultimately in charge, and truly desires that this entire Creation be in harmony. So in spite of the discord and dangers that surround him, Jesus centers his life on Divine peace and wholeness - which allows him to convey that peace and wholeness to others. And this can be the same for you and me today. As you and I put our trust in the Good News that Jesus Christ reveals, we become partners in Christ’s healing and redeeming work in this world.

So here’s the bottom line: When you and I chose faith over fear, love rather than indifference - our potential for rejection and pain is likely to increase! Yet so does the potential for genuine wholeness, meaning and joy - for us and for all those around us. Jesus the Christ finds his Divine fulness by feeding the hungry, healing the sick, raising-up the oppressed, and embracing all people. And it’s his insistence upon this kind of Divinely Inclusive Compassion, that causes the controlling religious and political leaders to seek to have him crucified! Fortunately, Jesus doesn’t lose faith - he doesn’t give-up his mission or message as the Christ - because he trusts that the power of Divine Love will ultimately triumph over the forces of fear and darkness, and even death. The rising Light of Easter morning reveals that Jesus has it right.

So, what might this mean for you and me today? It means that Jesus’ order “not to tell anyone about him” has been revoked! It is O.K. to speak-up! In fact, you and I are now encouraged to boldly proclaim - and reveal - the Christ of Love, and the Love of Christ!

A perfect love that casts out all fear;

An extravagant love that welcomes all people;

An eternal love, that can overcome despair and doubt, darkness and death;

An unshakable love upon which you and I can securely base our hopes, and faithfully build our lives!