

Lent 2B

Expectations often let us down. when my expectations are not met, i often get upset and take it out on nikolai. My expectations let me down..Michael Leunig sounds like some of Jesus' disciples in his



cartoon. He writes:

'Who do you say that I am?' Asks Jesus..That is the verse before today's gospel reading. By this time in Mark's story the disciples have been with Jesus for some time and have seen him cure the sick and lame, cast out demons, feed literally thousands of people, even restore life to a young girl. Little wonder, then, that Jesus might ask what the crowds thought of all this. And the disciples do not disappoint, reporting that the crowds indeed recognise that Jesus is clearly a prophet, a holy man of God.¹

But he goes on and asks that question "Who do you say that I Am?" Peter has been watching, listening, 'you are the Messiah' he says, and that comment carries loaded expectations.

The messiah Mark is talking of though is one who suffers, like us..like the one in Michael Leunig's cartoon.

¹ http://day1.org/1434-the_heartbreaking_messiah The Rev. Dr. David Lose

After Peter's great confession Jesus neither affirms or congratulates him but instead sternly orders the disciples not to tell anyone.

What? How can this be? This is the greatest news in the world and you don't want us to share it with anyone? Are you kidding?

Jesus' words etch tiny fissures into the depths of Peter's heart and hopes, fissures that spread like cracks in a windshield.²

"Then 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" until at last comes the final blow, "and be killed"--and there it goes, Peter's heart, fracturing into a thousand shards of disappointment so loudly that it drowns out Jesus' final promise, "and be raised on the third day."³

No wonder Peter rebukes him. This is not what Peter expected.

This sounds like blasphemy. The saviour of the world, suffer? God's messiah, die? Are you mad?

Peter, you see, wants and needs a strong God. Like so many of his day, he's looking for a descendant of mighty king David to come and overthrow Roman rule and restore Israel to its rightful place among the nations. Jesus has to be that person. After all, he's already brought relief, comfort, healing, and life. So what's all this talk about suffering and death?

Peter wants a strong God...and who can blame him. Are we any different? When the crushing weight of hardship bears down upon us, when the voices of despair drown out all others, when it's one disappointment after another, don't we also want a strong God to avenge our hurts, to right all wrongs, and to put us back on top of things?

Except...except that it's precisely when I'm down and out, when life's setbacks and disappointments have conspired to make me feel like I'm nothing, that I wonder what a God of might, strength, and justice--the God of winners, that is--has to say to me, an ordinary everyday person, who often feels far closer to defeat than to victory, to depression, than exaltation.

I think this is what Jesus means in his rebuke to Peter by contrasting divine things and earthly ones. By our human reckoning strength is everything. But God employs a different calculus and

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³ ibid

measures strength not in terms of might but of love, not by victory but vulnerability, not in possessions but in sacrifice, not by glory but by the cross.⁴

Jesus knows this; but Peter does not, at least not yet. Much later in Mark's story, Peter denies his Lord three times and then must watch Jesus beaten, nailed to a cross, and die...alone. He learns a lot about suffering then.

No longer strong, but desolate, no longer thirsting for victory, but desperate for a measure of relief from the pain, Peter takes his broken heart and hides, hoping against hope that his despair will some day pass.

Until, on the third day, the rumour begins to circulate that Jesus has been raised. And soon enough Peter will hear that the messenger who heralded these tidings said, in fact, not just to tell the disciples, but to tell the disciples and Peter-- yes, Peter, who denied and fled, Peter, who is now broken and defeated--to tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus would meet them in Galilee, just as he promised.

And at that moment Peter is opened wide by a mercy he couldn't formerly comprehend and knows he doesn't deserve; he is split apart with sudden insight into a divine vulnerability that transcends human measures of strength. He is cracked wide open to the possibility that mercy, grace, forgiveness, and life surpass our earthly categories and for this reason can promise and grant new and eternal life.

Peter's heart breaks in today's reading because he doesn't get the God he wants. It breaks again at the end of the story when he realises that instead of getting the God he wants, he gets the God he needs.

So it will also be with us, as we recognise that the God we worship comes not for the victorious but for the vanquished and seeks out not the mighty but the down trodden. Our God comes, as Scripture bears witness, to feed the hungry, to heal the lame, to free the bound and to bind up the broken-hearted. Our God comes, that is, for us.⁵

⁴http://day1.org/1434-the_heartbreaking_messiah

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We continue our Lenten journey as cracked and broken people bringing our whole selves to Jesus, the anointed one, the Messiah, the human one, the suffering one, who offers healing, rest, encouragement, light.

And so we pray: Come, Lord Jesus, break open our hearts that we might perceive your profound love for us and all people and receive your mercy and grace. Amen
(With thanks to David Lose)

susanna