

Mark, who wrote our gospel text for today, was a master storyteller. In the opening verses of his account of Jesus' life he tells US that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, the Christ. And therein lies OUR hope, our faith.

Then Mark lets us watch Christ's first followers figure out for themselves just who Jesus is. In this way, Mark lets us watch Jesus' first disciples develop THEIR hope, their faith. Being clued in, we get to shake our heads at just how thick-headed Jesus' first disciples seemed to be.

Here today, at the very core of Mark's gospel, Jesus asked his disciples if they had figured out yet who he was and is. The answers were amazingly wrong. Jesus had been traveling around Palestine, teaching profoundly in synagogues since he was a child and performing great miracles. And every response of "the people" that the disciples repeated to Jesus misidentified him.

The people—those who weren't following Jesus—thought he was either a great teacher or some kind of symbol, some kind of persona of the past prophets who would signal the Messiah's coming. Apparently, what is required to identify Jesus correctly as the Christ is to be a follower of Christ Jesus.

Sounds circular, doesn't it? To recognize who Jesus is, we have to be a Jesus-follower, but why follow Jesus in the first place unless we know that he is the Christ?

I think the answer to this circular logic is "hope" and later, "faith." We begin wherever we begin to follow Jesus, hoping that he is the Christ. Later, our faith convinces us what we only had an inkling of from the start. Because with Jesus, we don't know exactly what we've got, even now. We think we know, but we use human logic. Just like Peter thought HE knew. "You are the Christ," he declared. And he was 100% correct. But then, when Jesus revealed what, exactly, his fate would be, this is where Peter faltered. What being the Christ meant was to have to die a painful death before returning to life again.

So, Peter tried to teach Jesus his own ideas about what the Messiah was here to do. Jesus told Peter that he didn't know what he was talking about.

Peter didn't see the HOPE that Jesus has shared. Peter was so focused on the suffering and rejection and death, that he missed the promise. The promise was this, "after three days rise again." Rise again to new life. We can forgive Peter; in his experience, rising again to life after being executed had never happened, had never even been seriously considered a possibility.

WE know the story, not only who Jesus really is, but how Jesus' Resurrection proclaimed for all our abiding hope and faith that we, too, will rise after death to be with him.

Jesus' disciples were those who wanted to help him accomplish his mission. Jesus was forever urging people to step forward out of the crowd into discipleship.

Here is where Jesus identified what the difference is between followers who are just in the "crowd" and those who are his "disciples." Disciples are those who, in Jesus' words:

- Deny themselves,
- Take up THEIR cross, and
- Follow him.

At this service today we will honor four of our Christ-followers, one of whom has passed her life's work of following Christ to beyond the grave. Betsy Raymond was known to many of you as a person who could be counted on to get involved, to lead when leading was needed. She was a gentle soul with a great heart for helping people. She served as Senior Warden when our first Rector, Jim Green, was sick. Later, she served as one of our Trustees, one of the people in whose name our real estate was held.

I am grateful that Betsy's son Matthew and his family are with us today to share our memories of Betsy as we consecrate the items Betsy's family donated in her name.

The other three people we will honor today all stepped out of the crowd of Christ-followers last Sunday further into discipleship. Angie Armwood and Taylor Hall were Confirmed and David Maxwell was Received into the Communion of disciples known as The Episcopal Church. In this way they each said "yes" to God in a new way, showing us that God is working in their lives. Of course, they did this over at Meade Memorial Church, so today is our chance to congratulate them on this new step forward.

To each of you, I offer this great hope and an anchor for our faith: that we, too, like Jesus, will rise again. Jesus teaches us that what is required is that we set aside what we think is optimal for us personally, to "pick up our cross" and follow him.

Jesus added what I call the "Resurrection promise." He said, "For 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." Isn't THIS the crux of the Resurrection story? Deliberately choosing to forfeit life as we know it, as Jesus did and in the process gaining new life? Isn't this OUR hope, as Jesus followers, to "take up our cross" and follow him, to death and beyond? Isn't this our faith, that there will be a "beyond" with Jesus? Beyond life to new life. Beyond death to new life?

Nine years ago on this very day we held “Voting Sunday” here at Church of the Resurrection. This is when we asked each person here at the time to make a “go/no go” decision on whether to redevelop our property to provide affordable housing for our community and a new church facility for us and for those who come after us. On that day we had to decide where to place our hope and our faith. And—as you might surmise—we stepped out of the crowd that day and followed Jesus—wherever that leads—even to our own eventual death and beyond.