**Mark 8:27-38 (ESV)**

**27**  And 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?” **28** And they told him, “John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.” **29** And he asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Christ.” **30**  And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him. **31**  And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. **32** And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. **33** But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” **34** And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. **35** For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. **36**  For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? **37** For what can a man give in return for his soul? **38** For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

**“A Meaningful Word For You”**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. As we have learned in Home Fires, ambiguity and confusion describe our postmodern times. People trust no one, question everything, and have little foundation for life. The season of Lent offers a way of escape from the madness. Jesus lays everything on the table as God and man. He holds nothing back about His love for being the suffering Savior. What we heard from our reading of St. Mark will surely catch your attention. All that talk about the cross tends to hit a person right in the face. It is for our good this happens especially during Lent. There is to be no misunderstanding over God’s Son, the purpose of the Gospel, or the Christian life. There is One we can trust, One we need not question, and One in whom we have a foundation for life. Jesus always speaks a meaningful word as the savior of the cross.

 On the way to Caesarea Philippi, Jesus ends up asking just the right question to confess His Saving Name. He does this not only to have the disciples lay out the differing views about Him. But also, to have them personally make known true faith in Him as the promised Savior. And so, “…He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Christ.” This was not a name, but a title. Christ is an Old Testament term for “The Anointed One.” Prophets, priests, and kings were anointed, but as the Book of Acts records, “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power” (Acts 10:38). To sum it up, He was the fulfillment to the long awaited promise from God. Peter and the other apostles knew this answer because they knew Scripture and witnessed what Jesus said and did as the Messiah.

 So too, the baptized in every age receive the same question. It is far more than just giving an answer like on a test or sharing information. Instead, asking, “Who do you say that I Am?” is how Jesus keeps bringing forth faith in Him as the Savior. Like the disciples, we must be aware of the various misconceptions people have toward Jesus. This is even more so today in our country as it has less and less to do with a Christian worldview. Yet, no matter the diverse opinions or delusions. Jesus ends up asking just the right question for the baptized. It is to confess Him as the Savior sent from the Father. As St. Paul states, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope” (Romans 15:13). This believing is an answer grounded alone upon God’s Word and from what Jesus makes known of Himself for us today in His sacraments.

 After asking His question, Jesus had just the right teaching to cast out the Devil. The title “Christ” could be turned into many things that had nothing to do with the cross. Jesus knew this kind of temptation offered by the Devil. He experienced it in the wilderness for forty days. In order to deal with such false corruption concerning Christ. His disciples now heard for the first time, what He would also say on two other occasions. As St. Mark states, “And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.” As clearly as the confession that, “He was the Christ.” Likewise, Jesus clearly and unashamedly unpacked the meaning of Christ to be in the cross. Peter liked the style of Jesus as the Christ, but could not handle the substance being His suffering and death. He tried to silence the Savior in whom He had just faithfully confessed. Yet, the deception became evident when Jesus said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan!”

 The Devil knows apart from the Word, even the baptized are helpless to false deceptions of glory. It is why Jesus later gave the warning, “See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray” (Matthew 24:4-5). We want to imagine faith is untouchable, but it is vulnerable apart from the Word. Luther warns, “For where the heart stands idle and the Word is not heard, the devil breaks in and does his damage before we realize it” (Tappert 379). We can end up like Peter, being against the God who works through suffering and death. There is a lot of silencing going on today. And as much as we want to blame the culture, unbaptized people, and other factors. They know nothing of the cross, but we do. Lent has sharp words to the closest disciples of Jesus. We have had our minds set upon the things of man and not the things of God. Lord have mercy and cast out the Devil’s deception. Let Your saving Word work by the glory hidden in the cross.

 Having spoken to the darkness that threatened His sacrifice as Savior. Jesus proclaimed just the right direction to call out His love for sinners. Assembling the crowd and the disciples, He said, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” Here was an open invitation. No one excluded. No one forgotten. No one left behind. The sinner had to hear “deny yourself and take up your cross,” but the saint living by faith could hear the promising appeal, “and follow me.” It is this “me,” where Jesus proves to be a better savior than any of His servants. If such a way was based upon works and not faith in the God who calls out His love for sinners. The Psalmist David would not have declared, “Remember your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. (Psalms 25:6). Jesus as the “anointed one” is the age-old promise for all to repent and believe this way of Christ crucified.

 What keeps us away from Lent is not Jesus. It is His Words about denying self, bearing one’s cross, and having to follow. It all seems to go in the wrong direction. Yet, such a command comes from the same God who cares enough to suffer and die for you. St. Paul proclaims, “For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.” Lent does not lead us down a dead end road. To deny self, take up the cross, and follow is before the One who died, but lives. Forgiveness comes by how God’s Son denies Himself in order to save shameful sinners. Love endures because Jesus gives His sacrifice as our victory to eat and to drink. Salvation is certain because it rests upon following Him who is faithful to us all. Jesus always speaks a meaningful word as the savior of the cross. Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.