

## Disappointed Disciples

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Rev. Dr. Dale Skinner

St. Stephen's-on-the-Hill United Church

A reading from the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 8, verses 27 to 38:

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?" And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

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, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 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. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Years ago, I remember an occasion when a man I knew bought his very first brand new car. He loved everything about that new car. He love the way it shone in the sunlight, the way it smelled. It was everything he ever wanted in a car. And he was so protective of it. Whenever he parked it in a lot, he was always careful to park it away from other vehicles so it wouldn't get any scratches or dings in it. He washed it regularly and kept it in tip-top condition. But then one day it happened. This man had parked his car in what he thought was a safe spot and then when he returned to his car, he noticed that something wasn't quite right with the front bumper. It wasn't as shiny as the rest of the car. As he took a closer look, he realized that another vehicle must have rubbed up against the front corner of his car. It had rubbed off some of the clearcoat and paint, and left a number of scratches and had pushed the surface of the bodywork in ever so slightly. Even though it was for the most part barely noticeable unless you were really looking for it, my friend was devastated. Here he thought he had everything he wanted in that new car of his and then suddenly, it became less than he wanted. He was left to deal with the disappointment. Now, to be fair to this guy, he knew that he was upset over a material thing. Yet the feelings of disappointment that he experienced were real.

Now some of us do better than others when it comes to dealing with life's disappointments. These disappointments can come in all shapes and sizes and can happen when we least expect. How do you deal with disappointment in your life -when things lose

their lustre and shine? How do you deal with the scratches and the dents, or worse? When it comes to our disappointments, is there an underlying sense of disappointment with God?

Dealing with disappointment is something at the heart of this text from the gospel of Mark that we heard this morning. It's about Peter's and the rest of the disciple's disappointment in Jesus and with some of the things Jesus was beginning to say about himself. You see up to this point the disciples thought they had a brand new, shiny Messiah. There had been others who had come before Jesus who had also claimed to be the Messiah of God's people. A Messiah who would make things right again. Peter and the other disciples believed that Jesus was their man...and their Messiah. Jesus was the one who was going to make life everything they thought it should be. They had witnessed Jesus do some amazing things -miracles and teachings that were like protective coats of wax that only served to insulate his authority and enhance his Messianic lustre. The disciples were going to ride with Jesus all the way to the good life.

But then something happened. Jesus, "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, and be killed, and after three days rise again." I don't know if you heard that or not, but those words of Jesus sounded like the disciples' shiny new car backing into a light pole. Their Messianic hopes had just been crushed. The language the text uses here is pretty strong when it says that Peter took Jesus aside in order that he might rebuke him. Back then rebuking was something you did to someone you thought was possessed by a demon or an evil spirit. Peter believed at this point that Jesus was out of his mind and needed to be set straight. Suddenly Jesus isn't everything that Peter and the other disciples had hoped for. This isn't what Peter wanted. Peter felt he had all he wanted in Jesus already and he didn't want that taken away. He didn't want a Messiah that would suffer, be rejected and killed. Those were marks of failure and shame. In an instant, in the eyes of Peter and the other disciples, the life they had been hoping for in Jesus, was one that looked like it belonged in a scratch and dent sale. It's not what they wanted.

No longer having what we wanted or what we thought we had is a cause of disappointments for everyone. That's what happens when life loses its lustre, we start to realize we no longer have what we wanted. When your beautiful little toddler knocks their head on a coffee table and they need stitches and you're sure that it's going to leave a scar you can find yourself disappointed. When you discover that the person you thought was the love of your life and was everything you wanted suddenly isn't, the immediate reaction can be disappointment. When your teenage son who you trusted intentionally deceives you and you find out, you're going to be disappointed. When a young adult has been raised told that he or she can do and be whatever he or she wants and so go school and spend years getting an education only to find out that the job they were studying for isn't available, there is disappointment. When you carefully plan for your retirement and then when you get there the economy goes flat and so do your investments there is disappointment. I could go on naming ways in which we find ourselves disappointed in our lives, but I know I don't have to because it's something we all experience. I know there are a lot of people in the hockey world who woke up disappointed today but maybe with no NHL season, perhaps Leafs fans have been saved some disappointment this year...who knows?

In any case, make no mistake, the experience of disappointment is the experience of pain. As C.S. Lewis once noted, “this pain shatters the illusion that all is well and it also shatters the illusion that what we have on our own is enough.” Because we can believe we have everything, but still not have God. And when what we believe we wanted is suddenly taken away from us, we can still cling to wanting that old way...the way we thought it should be. We can remain stuck while everything else around us keeps moving forward.

One thing that is important to remember when it comes to how we handle our disappointments is that they can isolate us, cut us off from others, even God. I think a part of this is because of disappointments become a source of shame for us. We don't get the life we want. We don't get the god we want -the god who protects our expectations and keeps things looking pretty the way we want them to. Sometimes life gets ugly.

Jesus doesn't want Peter or the other disciples to cling to the life they believed they were entitled to. This is why Jesus responds to Peter's rebuke with the words, “Get behind me Satan, for you are setting your mind not on Divine but on human things!” Jesus wants Peter to understand that it is Peter and not Jesus that is possessed. Peter is possessed with his preconceived notions about how life should be and what God should do in order to make that life happen.

And the words of Jesus aren't just for Peter at this point but for the whole crowd when he turns to them and says, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to cling to their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?” I like the way this text reads in Luke's gospel. It says, “for what does it profit a man to gain the whole world if he loses his soul?” Jesus says these things because he wants the disciples to understand that there are lasting consequences when we start to cling to the way we think things should be. We can want life to be everything that we hope for, but as a result, we can fail to let life become more than we can imagine. We can deny God's hope for us.

Too often we let ourselves stay in the place of disappointment and choose to suffer like some medieval monk who hides away in a cell and inflicts punishment on himself. You know when Jesus says pick up your cross and follow me, he's not saying that we are to choose a life of self-inflicted pain and suffering. If we truly pick-up our cross and follow him then what we are saying is that we follow him, even when things get ugly because the way of Christ leads to resurrection.

Yes, we will still carry our crosses and the marks of our disappointment -the scratches and the dents that we have experienced through life. Even the risen Jesus still bears the wounds of his crucifixion but life goes on. Like it was with Peter, we are called at one level to let go of the life we wanted in order to get to the life we could never imagine. But that's what it means to have faith. Hope in the things we have seen isn't hope at all it's a source of false happiness.

As the theologian David Lose writes, “In Jesus and his cross and resurrection we discover, not the God we may want, but the God we desperately need. The God whose sheds glory to join us in our shame; the God who leaves heaven to enter our hells-on-earth; the God who abandons strength -- at least strength as we imagine it -- so that God can join us, embrace us, hold onto us, and love and redeem us at our places of disappointment. The God we meet in

Jesus, that is, comes for those broken in body, mind, or spirit to be one with us and for us. This God will understand our disappointments, and even expects them. Moreover, this God will meet us in them to teach us anew and again that *it is at the places of our brokenness that we sense, meet, and are enveloped most fully in God's strong love.*" It is in those places where resurrection holds its true promise for us. Rather than regarding God as a parachute who is there for emergencies we hope we never have to use, we should seek to be using the strength of God all the time. As Paul wrote to the Romans, "Endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."

I think what God is saying to us in Jesus is that rather than always being a shiny new car that should always stay the same, a life of faith resembles something more like a car that belonged to the parents of a childhood friend of mine. It was an old Volvo station wagon. It was so old that the yellow paint on it was actually quite faded. In order to keep the body from rusting out on it, over the years, my friend's Dad had (evidently) time and again, taken out a roll of masking tape and some of that reddish-brown spray paint to treat the rust spots. The old yellow station wagon had so many primer spots on it that it looked like a leopard -even the engine roared. In fact, we used to call the garage that it was parked in its lair. But in spite of all of those scars and its less than sparkling appearance, that car always seemed to emerge from its cave able to make another journey.

That my friends is what the call of the Messiah Jesus is like. God wants us to emerge and embrace the potential and the possibility to start again even when things get ugly. When we move out of the cave of our hiding and disappointment we are following the way of Jesus. Life is more than we have imagined the faith of Messiah has revealed it.

Thanks be to God.