

Albert Schweitzer, *Quest For the Historical Jesus*

**Mark 8:31-9:6**

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.' And he said to them, 'Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.'

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' He did not know what to say, for they were terrified.

**“The Gospel of Mark: Christ is Coming. There is a Reckoning”  
(The Gospel of Mark: Learning Through Suffering)**

**Rev. Charles Schuster**

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When the Gospel of Mark was written, 70 AD, 40 years or so after the crucifixion, when the Gospel of Mark was written there was nothing about the life and teaching of Jesus. There were sayings of Jesus, quotes of Jesus. Paul had written his letters about Jesus. The church was underground. It took courage to join it. The Jews had provoked the Romans. Roman symbols put in Jewish temples. Roman emperors, to be obeyed and worshipped as a god. And the Jews revolted, and the Romans destroyed the temple in Jerusalem as a show of power. And Christians were seen as a sect of Judaism, and Jesus was thought of as trouble, and the Romans crucified him, and it was in this atmosphere of terror and protest and civil unrest that Mark wrote this Gospel.

Mark tried to say two things. Jesus was a spiritual leader, not a military leader. He was not a troublemaker. And Jesus was crucified like a criminal because it was part of the plan. Because they had to explain why, if Jesus is your Messiah, was he treated like a criminal? It was part of a plan, Mark said. He was crucified so he could be raised from the dead in judgment. This Gospel is, I think, one of the most important documents ever written. It gives us a glimpse into Jesus' life, and provides us a way to read his teaching. And if it hadn't been for Mark, Matthew and Luke would have had nothing to use as their foundation. If it hadn't been for Mark, there may not have been a church, or the Christian

faith. Important for us today is the image of Jesus Mark gave us. The Book of Kells, in Dublin, Ireland, pictures Mark as a lion. It's on the front of your bulletin again. A lion. Mark wants us to see Jesus as having the courage of a lion, and this gospel speaks to any of us today who is unsure about where life is leading. This gospel speaks to any of us today who is unclear about what good we have done. What are we doing with life? What have we done with our life? Jesus, in Mark, helps us answer those two questions.

First of all, what are we doing with our life? It's about life. It's about looking at life, and what we are doing with our life. Boy scouts on a project that was first aid, they were to learn first aid, three of them were to pretend that they needed medical attention. Two were stationed along a trail. The third one was further up the trail. The others in the troop were to come upon each of these boys and they were to administer first aid. The third scout was to pretend that he had a cut on his arm and was bleeding, but it took so much to get to him, since he was way further up the trail and they had to deal with the others, that when they arrived at that place on the trail where he was supposed to be, they saw a note that said, "I have bled to death and gone home."

Sometimes it feels like that. We have bled to death and want to go home. And we ask ourselves, what are we doing? Once I was on an airplane flying from Denver to Dallas, and sitting next to me were these players from the Oklahoma 89ers baseball team. I sat in the middle seat between the second string catcher and the center fielder. Daryl, the center fielder, sat next to the window. He was the veteran. He had already been up to the major leagues. In fact, I was told that he played for the Kansas City Royals when they were in the World Series. He had made it to the big show, but for some reason, he had lost it. Daryl was kind of sullen, didn't say a whole lot. The only thing I really heard him say, except toward the end of this, was he wanted to know how many games were left before they could stop playing. The answer was twenty. It had been a long season.

Mike was the catcher who sat in the aisle seat. Three of his fingers were taped. He was the second string catcher. He grew up in Pittsburgh. He'd been around baseball all his life. He knew many of the Pittsburgh Pirate baseball players. Mike the second string catcher knew he would never make it to the major leagues, but he seemed content with his role, told me that in a few weeks several of the players on his team would be called up to the parent team, which at that time was the Texas Rangers, and that he would not be one of them. The mood of the players was somber. It had been a long season, they had played poorly in Denver. The Denver team was the minor league Zephyrs. They served a meal on that, flight, so you know how many years ago that was. And it was what it was then, it was airplane food, it was some kind of chicken rolled up in the shape of a grenade, and when Mike cut into his chicken it squirted all over him, and he was a little afraid to eat it, but his appetite overcame his fear. And as we were landing in Dallas, the coach passed out tickets for the next leg of their flight, to Oklahoma City, and Daryl, the center fielder, held up the ticket in front of me. He said, "Would you like to go to Oklahoma City?" and I said politely, "I appreciate the offer, but I wouldn't want to accept." He said, "That's what I thought. I don't want to go there either."

Where are we going? What are we doing? Comedian Gilda Radner, she wrote a book. The title of the book is, what Gilda Radner would often say, *It's Always Something*. She knew she was dying of cancer, and she wrote this book. It's a very profound book, it's not a funny book. I've now learned the hard way that some poems don't rhyme, and some stories don't have happy ending. What are we doing? Where are we going? What is happening to us? How do we face it with the heart of a lion? No promise life would be easy. No guarantee things would be fair. No one said that the world as it is, is the world as it was supposed to be. It is what it is, and we're in it. We can take it and we can make it, we can face it and grace it, whatever it is, however it goes, because we are at our best when we do not get our way. We are strongest in spirit when all the options have been reduced. Our greatest hour often comes when we live through our deepest suffering, because we have found what Nietzsche called the Why to live for. And Jesus said, "The son of man must undergo great sufferings, and if anyone wants to become followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

Mark gives us Jesus, who took up his cross, and for those who wonder what they're doing, faith is not an answer, it's an attitude. Edward R. Murrow said it, he said, "If your knees knock, kneel on them and pray." Take a look at what we're doing. Richard Carlson did. Richard was a high achiever. He worked really hard. Work was his life. Then he got married. At the wedding, actually two days before the wedding, it was a beautiful time of year, late August, Pacific Northwest, but there was this call that came from his father. His best friend and his best friend's girlfriend had been killed by a drunk driver. They were on the way to the wedding. The thought was, maybe to postpone the wedding, but there were three hundred and some people who had come to be with them, so the wedding went on. There was a tear-filled moment of silence in the wedding when Robert and Sarah were remembered. Richard looked at what he was doing, slowed down his pace. Inspired by his good friend, who knew how to savor moments, Richard wrote, "I began to slow down my life. I began to focus on one thing at a time. I learned to dismiss the distractions from my mind, and for the first time, I was able to stop working when it was time to do other things. At times, I was able to do nothing at all, something I couldn't have done before. I appreciated life like never before because my tunnel vision had been replaced by a broader perspective. Rather than constantly postponing my life, waiting until everything else was in order, to enjoy myself, I began to enjoy the very process of living." Richard Carlson and his friend Joseph Bailey got together and they wrote a book, *Slowing Down to the Speed of Life*. And they wrote a series of books - *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff*, and it's all small stuff.

As we look at what we're doing, those who want to save their lives, those who work for the sake of work, will lose their lives. But if you want to save your life, live for the sake of the good news. Albert Schweitzer said it of Jesus, "He comes to us as one unknown by the lakeside without a name. And he will reveal himself in the toils and conflicts and sufferings which we pass through in his fellowship." Are we playing the game to win? How are we playing the game? And if we lose, how did we play the game? And when we play the game, we play to win. But what does winning mean? When we tap into our passion, are we led to act, to go for it? And does that tapping into our passion also tap into our compassion, so that when we leap forth, we raise up the hopes of others, so that

our passion does not trample theirs? When we tell the truth, is it because we'd like to be known as wise, or is it because we know the truth will set us free, all of us?

I went to an awards ceremony a couple of weeks ago. One of the honorees was Judge Julie Field. When she spoke, she said, "I live by the motto, to try to do something every day that makes me afraid." Just because the road is narrow and bumpy doesn't mean it's the wrong one. And if we are not sure of the destination, we can take comfort in the journey. And if the journey seems to be in doubt, and if we wonder if we're lost, we get in touch with the destination and we travel through the fog, knowing there is a place where we will be. Like Moses in the desert exodus, who kept his eye on the promised land, and kept his people fed with manna in the wilderness, which Garrison Keillor still believes is another name for tuna casserole. Jesus had the heart of a lion, and Mark shows us, through Christ, how to deal with life when we're not sure what we're doing or even if we have to go to Oklahoma City or Jerusalem.

Secondly, Mark gives us a Jesus who accomplished so much, yet did so little. When we think about it, when we look at life, what have we done? In Mark, Jesus speaks to his disciples but they don't understand him. When he was on the cross, as the people passed by, they mocked him. "You destroyed the temple and rebuilt it in three days? Save yourself, come down from that cross." He saved others, but he can't save himself. Even those who were crucified with him taunted him. And the disciples ran. And those women who stayed, when they saw the risen Christ, they were told to go tell the disciples, and you're going to read this as the benediction, it's in Mark, they didn't do it. What has he done? Don't know, but the Roman guard knew - this is in Mark - said "Surely this man is a son of God." Albert Schweitzer saw it. He said, "Jesus took the wheel of history, and he tried to move it, and the wheel rolled over him and crushed him, and it was only then, when he was broken by the wheel that the wheel began to bend or turn." "And you are my son, you are my child, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased," and at the end of his life, he said, "You are my son, my beloved." Listen to him. What had he done? This savior with the heart of a lion.

What have we done with our lives? Sometimes, we do know what we've done. A few years ago I was visiting a church member who was in the hospital, in intensive care, and he had the hiccups and he couldn't stop. I suggested to the nurse that I understood that it is possible to arrest this condition by frightening the patient. She said she didn't think that maybe intensive care was a good place to frighten somebody. The nurse was worried what a sudden noise might do to the physical state of the patient, and maybe the other patients around. I told her that I could frighten him without a loud noise or a sudden gesture. She said, "I'm going to stand right here with you, but go ahead." And so I walked over to his bed, and I said, "Now, I'm going to leave here and I'm going out in the parking lot where my car is, and in the car is last Sunday's sermon, and I'm going to go get that, and I'm going to bring it up here and read you last Sunday's sermon." It worked! The hiccups went away. That day, I knew what I'd done. I felt proud.

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At Annual Conference this past year, one of the district superintendents, a pastor and a good friend, Melanie Rose is her name, and she walked up to me and she said, "You said

something to me years ago when I was in seminary that saved my ministry." I said, "My goodness, what is that?" She said, "You looked at me one day and said, 'Melanie, when you get your own church, every now and then, preach a bad sermon on purpose. It will make them appreciate the good ones.'" After all these years to be told that you've done something good, it's wonderful.

But most of the time, we wonder what we've done. Mark's Gospel gave us Jesus, who wondered. I remember talking with a woman who had been an incredible influence on lots of young people. She was at a large university. She worked with students. She was much loved. I asked her one day, toward the end of her life. I said, "What is the one thing that you can remember that you're really most proud of?" It could have been the time that she talked down the woman from the roof of the dorm, who was going to commit suicide. Could have been then. Might have been the time she convinced the young man who wanted to drop out of school and go back home, because he was homesick, she convinced him to stay another week. Try it another week and he stayed and he became a Rhodes Scholar and he became the president of the university. Could have been the night that there was a fight on campus and she helped settle things down so the police wouldn't have to go in. So many things this remarkable woman had done. So important to so many people, they even put her name in one of the buildings. I looked at her and asked her that question, and she looked back at me and she said, "I don't think I've done much with my life."

Mark's Gospel is written for people who wonder, "What have I done with my life?" And then Mark is telling us, "It's more than you know." How do you measure the value of a kind word when somebody needed it and you gave it? And how do you grasp the importance of what it means to reach out when somebody wanted help and you were there? Marsha Sinetar said, "It is important to grow to see that our work is more than something we do to earn a living. It is that which helps us build a life." Earn a living. Build a life. It's when living is an art form, when moments are filled with laughter, when tears are shared when shed and so nobody cries alone. When panic is in the air and we're a calm presence and we defuse the bomb. When the interruption is seen as part of the agenda, and the interrupter feels included. We don't know what we've done, but it's more than we think.

It was written by a fifteen-year-old. "A great man died today. He wasn't a world leader, a famous doctor, a war hero, a sports figure. He was not a business tycoon. You will never see his name in financial pages. He was one of the greatest men who ever lived. He was my father. I guess you might say he was a person who was never much interested in getting credit or receiving honors. He did corny things, like paying his bills on time and going to church on Sunday and serving as an officer in the PTA and helping kids with homework and driving his wife to the grocery store on Thursday nights to shop. And he got a great kick out of hauling his teenagers and their friends around to football games. Tonight is my first night without him, and I don't know what I'm going to do with myself. I'm sorry for the times I didn't show him proper respect, but I am grateful for a lot of other things. I'm thankful God let me have my father for fifteen years. I'm hoping that I'm able to let him know how much I loved him. That wonderful man died with a smile on his

face, and I hope, a sense of fulfillment in his heart." A fifteen-year-old writes about her father, anonymously.

What have we done? More than we know. We chose to love every person we met. We chose to hope, every moment that we lived. We chose to give every time there was a need. We chose to believe, every time we were touched by doubt. We chose to pray when we thought there was nothing else we could do. What we have done with our life, we have chosen silence over noise, meaning over emptiness, and hope over absurdity, and God said to us, "This is my daughter, this is my son. You are beloved." because you listen to him. Mark gives us Jesus, who helps us think about what we're doing, and what we have done. Jesus who comes to us as one unknown, and who took the wheel of history. Mark gives us Jesus the courage of a lion, and when we read from his Gospel, the Gospel of Mark, we hear him roar, and we experience Jesus' courage ourselves. And that, my friends, is why we're proud to say we're Christian.