

TAKE UP YOUR CROSS AND
FOLLOW ME



2021
LENT
JOURNEY
Sunday February 28th

Prelude

Introduction

Invitation

Call to Worship:

Jesus teaches us about God's love. We are brothers and sisters together in God's family. Let us follow Jesus and live the way he wants us to live. Let us worship together!

Hymn: "Where He Leads Me, I Will Follow," vv. 1,4 (UMH #338)

Reading the Word: Mark 8:27-33

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."

Ministry of Music

Message: "Break Open The Box"

There is a saying that we sometimes hear when someone has revealed a secret for all to hear: "Letting the cat out of the bag." In today's scripture passage, Peter, "Let the cat out of the bag" when he declared Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God."

Jesus had asked his disciples who people said he was, and they gave a variety of names: John the Baptizer, Elijah, a prophet. Then, he asked them what they thought, and in a moment of great insight, Peter made a statement of faith saying that Jesus was the Messiah.

Since the writer of Mark consistently portrays the disciples throughout the gospel as not really "getting it," as failing to understand who Jesus was, Peter's declaration was an impulsive response, made without realizing the full implications of what he said. In verses that follow, it was clear that his understanding of the Messiah was not the Messiah that Jesus would be.

Throughout Jewish history, expectations of the Messiah were that he would be a great warrior king who would conquer other nations, like King David. This was a logical assumption for the disciples, too. They were all Jewish men who had heard the prophecies and would have looked for the powerful king who would save their people. With all the miracles they had witnessed in Jesus' ministry, we can surely understand how the disciples would think that Jesus would be able to put together an army to defeat Rome and become King of Israel. That would most likely be our expectation, as well. Who would believe in a Messiah who would be tried, hung on a cross to die, and then be buried in a tomb? That isn't the Messiah that the nation of Israel wanted or hoped for.

We know what it is like to have great hopes in someone and to believe in that person. All of us have, at some point in our lives, put our hopes and trust in a leader, a friend, a relative, or employer only to be let down, have our hopes dashed, and our trust shattered. How many times have we angrily said, "It wasn't supposed to be this way!" So often, we have placed our own expectations on the other person, and when they didn't live up to it, we were hurt and angry. It's important to remember that there is more to a person than what we see or what we know of them. Even with our closest family and friends, we can discover new things about them, something we hadn't realized, didn't know, or saw developing as they grew in their life experiences.

It's dangerous to try to put them into our own box of expectations because they will surely break out in order to become their own person. They force the box open, which is what Jesus did. He wouldn't allow the disciples to put him in a confining space where he would have to live up to their image of him. It wasn't for them to decide what kind of Messiah he was. Only God could do that, and God had much more in mind than the disciples could ever have imagined.

That's why, when Peter tried to stop Jesus from telling about his death and resurrection, Jesus turned to him and said, "Get away from me! You don't care about the same things God does. You care only about things that people think are important!"

It's so easy to let the world tell us who we are or who Jesus is or who God is. The world hands us all kinds of rules, assumptions, and expectations to put into our boxes, and then keep trying to hold down the lid so we don't have to think "outside the box." Yet, God won't be confined to our boxes. God will break open the boxes we build and will provide for us ways that only God can, but not necessarily in ways we expect.

My Systematic Theology professor used to tell us that the Bible only provided a small speck of who Jesus was and how God acts in our world and interacts with us. He would show a little space between his thumb and forefinger, and then he would spread his arms wide and say that God is far more than we could ever comprehend.

He let the cat out of the bag! The secret, which really isn't a secret at all, is that God won't be molded into our ideas of who God is, a powerful force in the world that no one controls. We can't create God - God has created us!

Our job as God's children and as followers of Jesus, is to keep learning, keep growing in faith and understanding, and not box God in, not try to limit God to what we want. When we are open to the hand of God working in our lives and calling us to keep on learning, we will grow in faith. We will never understand everything or have the answers to everything, but we can keep the box open! It is during the ordinary, every day events of our lives that revelations happen, and new insights come to us while reading the scriptures or praying or studying.

In Jesus we have been given new life. We die to our old sinful selves and are born by the Spirit into life with God in the family of God and the kingdom of God here on earth and beyond. Sometimes following Jesus is challenging, and we may be tempted to ignore God's call in our lives. But when we claim and re-claim the name "Christian" or "Christ follower" we will walk with Jesus and can have confidence in life here and now, and in the life to come.

So, this week, go ahead and let the "cat out of the bag!" Let us share the love of Jesus with others, and break open our boxes that keep us tied to relying on the world's idea of how we should think about Jesus. We can't keep him in the box anyway, so let us strive to learn more every day as we commit to being faithful followers, share God's love with others and grow in grace. Amen.

Prayer:

O God, we ask you to forgive us when we don't act in ways that show your love. Remind us that everything we have is yours, even our own lives. Help us not to try to box you in, but to think outside the box and to hear your voice. Give us directions for following Jesus by listening to his message, treating others nicely, caring about people, and remembering that you love us. Thank you, God! We love you! Amen.

The Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Hymn: "Living for Jesus," vv. 1,4 (FWS #2149)

Blessing

PRAYER WARRIORS NEEDED

Jen Patria
Bill Stover
Naomi
Erin Frane
Jim Slater
Charles Gilman
Barbara Clement

Harry Junkins
Fred Walton
Sophia
Barbara Glidden
Bobbie Noble
Dan Strange
Danny Westbrook

The family of Jeanne Westcott
The family of Bill and Gayle Gardei
The family of Cuiabano Barbosa
Jen - Stebbins daughter-in-law
Those in nursing and assisted living care
Front line workers
Our Denomination
Our Country
Our Church family
Those who have lost loved ones to COVID



WHO WE ARE

FUMC PORTSMOUTH A RECONCILING CONGREGATION

We, the congregation of the First United Methodist Church of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, are dedicated in worshipping, learning, and serving with all people as we embrace Jesus Christ's message of love and acceptance. As a United Methodist Church we stand fully behind the statement "Open Hearts, Open Minds, and Open Doors". We celebrate our diversity and invite all persons regardless of age, gender, racial or ethnic background, sexual orientation, marital or socioeconomic status, nationality, physical or mental ability into full membership and participation in the life of this community of faith.



One way to make a donation to FUMC is to point your phone camera on QR code and it will guide you through the process... thanks for making a difference.



FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
129 Miller Avenue - Portsmouth, NH 03801
Office Phone 603-436-6038
Email - office@fumcportsmouth.net
Website - fumcportsmouth.com

Pastor - Rev. Dr. Debra J. Hanson
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