

Confession of St. Peter

Text: Mark 8:27 – 9:1

Title: What have I gotten myself into?

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Have you ever spoken those words? Have they ever come to mind? What have I just gotten myself into?

Maybe it was your first day at your new job, when you realized all your new responsibilities and felt overwhelmed and in over your head.

Maybe you volunteered to do something, to coach a team or be a scout leader, or watch your friend's dog, and all of a sudden it was a much bigger commitment, much more work than you originally thought.

Maybe it was one morning when you woke up, rolled over and saw the person sleeping next to you, and thought, "What have I gotten myself into?"

Maybe it was the first time you held your newborn child in your arms, and it finally hit you that you were responsible for someone else's life. You may have thought, "What have I gotten myself into?"

Certainly that is the situation that Peter and the disciples have found themselves in in today's gospel.

Things have been going fairly smoothly for Jesus and the disciples to this point. There have been a few bumps in the road, but nothing major. Jesus has been doing His thing- preaching, teaching, healing, feeding the multitudes, and the disciples have been along for the ride.

But now we're nearing the end, coming down to the wire. Everything has led up to this moment, when Jesus asks His disciples the big question. This is the final exam. This is final jeopardy. The million-dollar question, "Who do you say that I am?"

Who is Jesus? That is the question posed to us in Christmas and Epiphany. It's both simple and complicated at the same time. Who is this Baby in the manger, heralded by angels and visited by shepherds? Who is this teenager in the temple, listening to the teachers and stumping them with his questions? Who is this man who comes to be baptized by John?

Peter thinks he knows the answer. He thinks he's got it all figured out. He's the first to raise his hand and venture an answer, "You are the Christ." You are the chosen one, the messiah, the promised one that will save Israel.

Was Peter right or not? Does Peter have the right answer? Mark actually doesn't tell us. All he says is that Jesus told them to keep quiet. Matthew includes Jesus' words to Peter, "Blessed are you Simon Peter, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but your Father in heaven."

Last week we heard the voice of the Father booming from heaven, "This is my Son, whom I love, with Him I am well-pleased." Peter was there for that. Peter was standing there at the banks of the Jordan River. He saw the dove, he heard the voice. It's the kind of thing you never forget.

And so Peter proudly confesses that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. A+ for Peter. He wins the jackpot, all the money, everything. He's solved the final puzzle, or so he thinks.

Peter has the right words, but he doesn't quite get it. He's in, but he doesn't know what he's in for.

Jesus tells the disciples up front what it means from Him to be the Christ and for them to be disciples. Jesus lays it all out. He tells it like it is. There are no surprises. There's no bait and switch. Jesus makes it crystal clear what it means for Him to be the Christ and for them to be disciples. Jesus tells His disciples straight up what they're getting themselves into.

Jesus starts with Himself. He tells His disciples what it means for Him to be the Christ. To be the Christ means that there will be a cross. He will die a painful death in Jerusalem.

According to our text, Jesus talks about this plainly. He doesn't beat around the bush. He doesn't use parables or hidden language. We have a hard time speaking plainly about death. We say things like "passed away," or "passed on" or "departed." But not Jesus. He knows what He's getting himself into. It wasn't as though Jesus didn't know what would happen to Him when He came to earth. Jesus knew what He was getting Himself into. And He came anyways.

Jesus knew exactly what He was getting Himself into. Jesus knew that He would be betrayed even by His closest friends. Jesus knew that He would be mocked and beaten. Jesus knew about the thorns, the nails and the spear. Jesus knew that His path lead straight to the cross.

And He still came. Jesus loved you so much, He came to earth and suffered and died for you. He didn't have to do it. He wasn't forced into it. Jesus freely and willingly goes to the cross for you.

Jesus tells the disciples what He's gotten Himself into, and He tells them what they are getting themselves into, too. Jesus tells the disciples up front what it means to be a disciple. Jesus speaks plainly and clearly. There's no way to misunderstand His words.

To be a disciple means to follow Jesus, and it means to follow Him to the cross. Even if the cross is your own. Jesus says, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." This is what it means to be a disciple: it means taking up your cross, it means denying yourself, in short, it means death. Being a disciple means being like Jesus, and we know that being Jesus means dying. Being a disciple means that you're not number one, that your wants and needs come last, not first.

This week the tourism board of Australia advertised what they're calling "The World's Best Job." They are looking for someone to live for six months in the beautiful Whitsunday Islands in the tropics. The job involves sitting on the beach, swimming, sailing, snorkeling, and having a good time. All that you have to do is write a blog about your experiences. The pay for six months of "work" is over \$100,000.

For many of us this would be a dream job. Getting paid to relax in paradise. This is what we're looking for in life- the chance to relax and get paid for it. This is not what it means to be a disciple. Sometimes we think that by following Jesus our lives will be easier, that everything will be perfect and we won't have to worry about anything. In fact, the opposite is true. Being a disciple means losing everything, even your own life, for the sake of the gospel.

To carry the cross means to give up everything. Nothing belongs to you. It all belongs to the Lord. Your time now belongs to the Lord to use in serving Him. Your money belongs to the Lord to use in helping the poor and needy. Your very life belongs to the Lord, to be given in service to your neighbor, just as Christ did.

Jesus says, "but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it." In Peter we see one who lost his life for the sake of the gospel and saved it. In the lesson from Acts we heard how the Lord took this "unschooled, ordinary man" (the Greek word here is literally "idiot") and filled Him with the Holy Spirit.

Peter continued to confess Christ even after His death and resurrection. Peter boldly proclaimed that Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation. Peter knew what He was getting Himself into. He was a witness to Jesus' crucifixion and death. He knew that He could suffer the same fate.

But Peter wasn't always such a bold witness. Although he has the right answer here, later he will deny Jesus three times. He abandoned Jesus in His time of great need. And then he hid in the upper room with the rest of the disciples.

But then came Pentecost. Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit, and could not stop talking about Jesus. He knew what he was in for. He knew that he faced certain death. And yet Peter still denied himself, took up his cross and followed Jesus.

Peter witnessed not only the crucifixion, but the resurrection. Peter knew that He would die with Jesus and that He would also rise with Him. Peter was given faith to trust that he too would experience that resurrection from the dead.

Today Jesus calls you to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him. He lays it all out for you. He wants you to know what you're getting yourself into. You have already denied yourself as you confessed your sin. The sign of the cross was made over you, putting to death your sins and nailing them with Jesus to the cross.

The rest of your life is one of following Jesus. Going where He goes. Walking the road to Jerusalem with Peter and the rest of the disciples. Seeing Him crucified and raised from the dead, and then being a witness to all these things.

Being a disciple means knowing that you will lose your life, but find new life in Christ. It means that you will die, but that you will be raised again. It means having salvation in the Name of Jesus. That's what you're getting yourself into.