

Nokesville UMC Sunday Worship
September 12, 2021
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Get Behind Me, Satan!
Mark 8:33-38

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Simon Peter, one of Jesus's disciples, was a fisherman in Galilee before Jesus called him. Because it was natural for the Jews in the 1st century to turn the father's business over to his sons, Peter was perhaps succeeded to his father's job. It was not a special occasion. Those who lived in Galilee had mostly two options, unless they were rich or the ruling class—becoming farmers or fishermen. In this circumstance, Peter became a fisherman regardless of his determination. Since he was a child, he might have followed his father to the Sea of Galilee and learned how to fix fishing nets, to throw them, to clean fish, to sell them, to steer a boat, to fix the boat... all about fishing. He lived as a fisherman for over thirty years. His life was all about fishing.

One day, Peter worked all night long to catch fish, but he caught nothing. The next morning, without any gain, he washed his fishing nets for the next chance. But we all understand the emptiness in his mind and heart. Meanwhile, a man suddenly jumped into his boat. Peter did not know much about Him but heard the rumors about Him that had been spreading in Galilee. People began to say that He healed the sick, gave some food to the hungry, and casted out evil spirits, so He might be the one they had waited for—the Messiah. Peter might have wanted to follow Him and see with his own eyes what He had done, but he was too busy to follow Him because he had to support his family by his fishing.

By the way, the one whom Peter wanted to follow visited Peter. And then, the man ordered Peter to put out his nets into the deep water and let them down for a catch. "He is a carpenter because his father was a carpenter in Nazareth. How does a carpenter order me to move and cast a net into a deep water? It must be ridiculous." Peter might have thought so, but he followed the man's orders, and then caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. Peter immediately fell down at Jesus's feet and said, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" (Luke 5:8). And Jesus replied, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will be catching people" (v. 10). This was the first moment that Peter met Jesus and that Peter met God. Peter left everything and followed the man. Since that moment, Peter followed the man wherever He went and saw and learned His teachings at the closest distance. He became the most beloved one among His disciples. And the man favored Peter.

But a serious tension between Peter and his Master occurred. It was an ordinary day when Peter visited Caesarea Philippi with his Master and colleagues. His Master all of the sudden shouted at Peter, "Get Behind Me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." What did Peter do to his Master? And why was his Master getting angry at His most beloved disciple?

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According to the Lectionary schedule, we read the Gospel of Mark 8:33-38. After Jesus performed a miracle—feeding 4,000 people with 7 loaves of bread and 2 small fish, Jesus and all His disciples moved to Caesarea Philippi. Jesus's disciples were still amazed by Jesus's feeding miracle. Jesus knew their minds, so He asked them, "Who do people say that I am?" They began to answer, "John the Baptist and other Elijah, and still others, one of the prophets" (v. 28). Jesus asked again, "But who do you say that I am?" This was what Jesus really wanted to hear from His disciples. "You are the Messiah [or the Christ]" (v. 29) Peter answered. The Gospel of Mark ended Peter's profession with this sentence and did not include Jesus's response. But we can find some more words of Peter and Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. In

Matthew 16:16, Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter¹, on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades² will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loosed on earth will be loosed in heaven” (vv. 17-19). What a great compliment! Jesus never ever gave such a compliment to His disciples except Peter. After listening to Peter’s profession, Jesus might have thought that the time had come to reveal His death and resurrection to His disciples, so Jesus began to tell them what would happen to Him.

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Jesus said quite openly, “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” (Mark 8:31). The disciples began to panic. Jesus clearly told them about His resurrection three days after His death, but the disciples might have been captured by the words of His death. Thus, Peter took a step forward to Jesus and strongly resisted His upcoming plan. Not only Peter but all the disciples reacted like this. Our reaction would probably be the same as Peter’s reaction. Jesus turned, looked at His disciples, and rebuked Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things” (v. 33). Just a few minutes ago, Peter received a great compliment from Jesus, but now he received the worst rebuke from Jesus that He ever gave to His disciples. Peter might have felt this was unfair. He dared to say so because of Jesus. He did not want his Master to be rejected, captured, to suffer, and to be tortured and killed. From a disciple’s stance, resisting was a quite natural and reasonable reaction. But Jesus’s reaction shocked Peter and all His disciples—even us. “Get behind me, Satan!” And Jesus added, “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?” (vv. 34-37).

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Jesus taught the ways to follow Him: First, He told them, “let them deny themselves.” What does it mean to “deny ourselves?” It means to throw away our old selves—our old life without Jesus or our old life that we pursued for the sake of our names. Since we believe in Jesus Christ, if we have pushed away greed and desire in our life and been filled with His love and care, yes, we live by denying ourselves. Second, Jesus said, “take up their cross.” What does it mean to “take up our cross?” For Christians, the cross is not an accessory that decorates our beauty. It represents pain or suffering in our lives. Our lives include a mixture of happiness and joy as well as pain and suffering. Thus, no matter whether we are believers or not, we come to face happiness, joy, pain, and suffering until we come back to the heavenly home. Don’t misunderstand—blessing does not mean to avoid human pain and suffering in our lives. Blessing is to rejoice and to find hope in pain and suffering.

Peter and other disciples might have dreamed something that would lift up their names through Jesus Christ. The kingdom that the disciples dreamed of and that Jesus dreamed of must have been different. So, Jesus taught His disciples using very strong words—Satan—that His ways did not follow human things. Let us think about ourselves. Do we set our mind on heavenly things for the sake of Jesus’s name rather than earthly things for the sake of our names? Amen.

1 The Greek word for Peter means rock.

2 That is, the realm of the dead.