2-24/25-18 Rev. Amy Haines

Mark 8:31-38 Foolish Love…Is Honest Lenten Series

Have you ever had that one person in your life who will be honest with you no matter what?

Sometimes that person is a close friend. Sometimes that person is a child with no filter.

Sometimes that person is your boss who criticizes more than compliments.

Over the years I have found that the closer I am to that person, the more open I am to listening to their honesty. Sometimes they tell me what I really don’t want to hear, yet because of the trust that has built up in our relationship, I am open to pondering what they have to say.

My friend Andrea was one those persons for me, especially our senior year in college. At that time of life I tried to avoid conflict. She, on the other hand, would tackle conflict head on. So if the conflict was between us, I knew that soon she would be at my dorm room door or would call me on the phone stating that it was time to talk. She was honest whether or not I was ready to hear what she had to say, honest with her mistakes and honest with mine.

At a previous church my trustees chair was also one of those honest, down to earth guys who told it like he saw it, was not afraid to confront, not afraid to ask hard questions, and also not afraid to ponder new ideas. If he saw my car at the church and something was on his mind he would stop by and talk. Sometimes he would ask questions. Sometimes he would share his opinions. We would not always agree on the state of the world or the ministries of the church,

yet I always knew where he stood on a number of topics and that even if we disagreed I knew I had his support.

Honesty within the context of a relationship can be life changing.

Honesty outside of the context of a relationship can be rude and damaging.

I, like many pastors do not pay attention to anonymous letters or vague concerns expressed to SPRC. While they may contain truth in what they say, without the context of a relationship there can be no honest conversation and thus no true resolution.

On social media I rarely read the comments sections on articles anymore, because too often the thread comments are more vicious than they are honest. How many times are words typed for all the world to see that would never be spoken face to face? I think comments threads bring out the worst of humanity, and never allow for mistakes, for bad days, for grace, for forgiveness. Just this last week such comments have been made about Fergie’s rendition of the National Anthem, the youth from Parkland, Florida, and even Rev. Billy Graham. Comments are often given without thought to the real persons to which they are aimed, and are often words we would never want directed back at us.

Think about your own life…

Would your friends, coworkers and family members consider you an honest person, willing to speak truth? Are you ever ridiculed because you are honest, willing to risk speaking the truth in love?

I have not reviewed recent polls on honesty. Years ago, however, only 50% of parents admitted to teaching honesty as an admirable trait, and more than 2/3rds of high school students admitted to lying, the opposite of honesty. In some circles honesty as viewed as an ancient characteristic.

..There was once a a lowly paid waiter in a major city who found a briefcase containing cash and negotiables in a parking lot—and no owner in sight. No one saw the waiter find it and put it in his car in the wee hours of the morning. But for the waiter, there was never any question of what to do. He took the briefcase home, opened it, and searched for the owner's identity. The next day he made a few phone calls, located the distressed owner, and returned the briefcase--along with the $25,000 cash it contained!

The surprising thing about this episode was the ridicule the waiter experienced at the hands of his friends and peers. For the next week or so he was called a variety of names and laughed at,

all because he possessed qualities the Bible holds in high regard: integrity and honesty.

 -Today in the Word, July, 1989, p. 18. Sill:honesty adapted

The definitions of honest include: truthful, real, humble, respectable, sincere, virtuous, free of deceit, fair. The origin of the word I found intriguing, for it comes from honor. When we are honest we are called not only to be truthful but also to share the truth in a way that still honors and values the other person. I had to laugh at one of the definitions of honest on urban dictionary-- “what everyone wants you to be, but no one wants to hear.”

 -#4 under honest on urbandictionary.com

I pondered that definition of being honest as I reflected on our Scripture passage today.

Does Peter, the disciples and the crowd following Jesus really want to hear the honest truth

 that Jesus shared with them that day? Do we want to hear the honest truth about the cost of following Jesus still today?

Prior to these verses Jesus has been on a whirlwind tour through the villages of Galilee, teaching and healing, casting out demons and proclaiming the good news of God’s kingdom.

Then one day, as they walked between villages, Jesus turned to his disciples and asked, “Who do people say that I am?” Up until this point Jesus’ identity had not been discussed, only assumed. So the disciples share the most common responses: John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets.

Then Jesus got personal, asking the disciples to be honest with him. “Who do you say that I am?” And Peter replied, “You are Christ, the Messiah.” In response, Jesus ordered the disciples not to tell anyone about him!

Jesus knows that the world is not yet ready for the kind of Messiah he was called to be. And Jesus knows that the disciples are not yet ready for the kind of Messiah he was called to be.

So in that moment, which is a pivotal turning point in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus turns away from the miracles and turns toward Jerusalem, and begins to prepare his disciples to see and receive God’s power and love, albeit in ways they would not expect.

As they continue to walk along the road, Jesus began to teach his disciples, as was his custom.

And what he began to say they were not yet ready to hear. Jesus was honest that he would not be the kind of Messiah they were expecting him to be. As the Son of Man, he would suffer- be rejected- killed and then rise again on the third day. Jesus said all this quite openly- plainly-

simply and clearly so the disciples couldn’t miss it. Yet still the disciples did not understand.

They expected the Messiah to be a military hero, a conquering warrior, one who would restore the fortunes of Israel and overthrow Rome’s authority in God’s Promised Land. They had seen his miracles; they were amazed at his teachings with authority.

Sure, they knew he upset the religious leaders. But for those same religious leaders to desire to kill him? That was a stretch many of the disciples were not yet ready to make. Neither could they wrap their minds around the concept of Messiah as suffering servant. A suffering servant was not a military conqueror. There would be no sword, no crown, no glory—only an ugly cross and an empty unexplainable tomb.

Jesus had spoken plainly. Yet still they did not understand.

Peter being Peter, drew Jesus apart from the others and privately began to rebuke him. Imagine an apprentice chastising a mentor! Peter felt comfortable enough with Jesus to be blunt honest with him.

Jesus, however, responded with a rebuke of his own—not only to Peter, but well within earshot of all the disciples. The Message describes this scene with these words:

Turning and seeing his disciples wavering, wondering what to believe, Jesus confronted Peter. “Peter, get out of my way! Satan, get lost! You have no idea how God works.” (MSG v32-33)

If Jesus could not get his own disciples to understand Messiah as suffering servant, the cross as good news of salvation for all, how would the world understand what Jesus was about to do?

Peter’s rebuke also tapped into Jesus’ greatest temptation, the same one offered by Satan to Jesus in the wilderness—the temptation to avoid suffering with a mighty display of power.

So Jesus said to Peter,

“You are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” (NRSV v33)

Yet we are human, that is how we think. We think about what’s in it for us. We think about the personal cost of any risk. We think about the opinions of others. We think about pain and discomfort, humiliation and rejection.

But that is not how Christ calls us to think. Christ calls us beyond our narrow focus, our tunnel vision, that is so often about us and our needs- to God’s great vision, a vision of salvation for the world, good news of God’s love for all of us.

Jesus goes on to explain, to his disciples, to the crowd ever present with him, and even to us today, what is the true cost of following him. Jesus’ mission was no mere entertainment. His mission was no less than the salvation of the world. Showing up for worship today is only the first step in following Jesus, even though it is an important step to gather with the body of Christ. As Christ followers we are called to live in response to what we believe every day, in all areas of our lives.

Talk about honesty! Jesus has explicitly described what it would take to be his follower, to be his disciple. Are we ready to hear his words that describe Self-denial--Cross bearing--Risking one’s life--Being unashamed?

Self-denial is not merely an abstaining from the pleasures of life, a personal denial or delayed gratification. Rather self-denial is denying one’s own self from being in charge. It is changing leaders, so to speak, where we get out of the way of our own lives and allow Jesus to lead. It is changing communities and changing identities. It is focusing on the ways of God rather than the ways of man, the desires of God rather than our personal desires.

Cross-bearing is more than being a passive victim or a patient martyr. Cross bearing means that we are willing to suffer ridicule and rejection due to our choice to be faithful to the gospel message and the way of Jesus. To take up our crosses means we intentionally choose what we might have avoided, in spite of the risk, in order to share God’s love with the world. We don’t count the cost of such a risk to personal comfort or even our very lives.

If we become ashamed of the Gospel—not the church or the face of religion often seen on the news—if we become ashamed then who will proclaim such good news to the next generation?

We must be willing to both live as well as speak about what a difference Jesus has made in our lives, as a crucified and risen Savior and Lord.

As shocking as these words were to Peter, the first disciples and the crowd who followed Jesus,

they are no less shocking to us today. We know we are currently on the journey of Lent, a journey that guides us toward the cross and the empty tomb.

Yet our human nature wants the easy path. We want the fun path. We still want the triumphal Jesus not the suffering Jesus. We want to follow Jesus into victory! Not into the struggles of others.

This passage is as hard to live as it is to hear. We want life with Jesus to be a road of happiness and pleasure because God is with us, and we know who wins the victory over sin and even over death. Christ does!

Yet in the meantime, we will still have struggles. We will still face the consequences of life. We are not immune to the ups and downs of life simply because we follow Jesus. In fact, when we say yes to Jesus, we may find ourselves with more struggles, for now we are seeking God’s ways instead of the world’s ways. And the world will be honest with us that they do not like the ways of God.

So you may be sitting there thinking, I appreciate Jesus’ honesty on the cost of following him,

yet is it really worth such a cost? Do I really want Jesus to make a difference in my life?

Look around you for a moment. Think about those you respect as faithful men and women. If you were to take them out to lunch, and ask them if following Jesus, if identifying with Christ,

is worth it all, what kind of response do you think you might get?

They may tell you of fears and failures, but will also tell you of strength in hard times, and peace in the midst of chaos. They may tell you of struggles in their faith journeys, but also tell you of undeniable moments of God’s presence. They may tell you of sacrifice and suffering, but also describe joy and blessing.

Is following Jesus worth it all? I would not be standing before you today if I could not say an emphatic yes in response.

This passage sounds like the stuff we hear in the headlines every day, bad news of suffering, rejection, oppression, even death.

Yet this is once again the message of the cross. The honesty of God’s great love for us. Christ died so that we might live. God flipped the cross from a symbol of death to a symbol of new life. On that cross, we see God through God’s Son, a suffering God, a vulnerable God, a forgiving God, a loving God. God is still creator of the universe, but now God is also personal. God is willing to send the Messiah, God’s very own Son, to suffer and die on the cross for all humanity,

to save us all from sin.

The final word of God is not suffering but resurrection.

The final word of God is not the cross, but the empty tomb.

Let the honesty of that good news sink into your heart and mind and soul today. The cross shows God’s great love for us. And when we take up our crosses, when we willingly sacrifice for others, in obedience to God’s ways in our lives, we share the good news of God with others!

..Mark knows, however, that only those who follow Jesus all the way to the cross will really know who he is. If we stop before Calvary, we will misunderstand him. We will assume that he is just another miracle worker, or another exorcist, or a wise and compelling teacher. If Peter and the other disciples proclaim him Messiah based on what they have seen thus far, they will have proclaimed a false Messiah. His identity can only truly be known at the cross. There, even an unenlightened Roman soldier will be able to recognize him: "Truly this is the son of God."

--Kenneth Carder “Why Follow Christ?” 9-14-97 day1.org

Time and again in the Gospels, Jesus shook up common expectations with the truth of God. The meaning of Messiah. The expectations of a relationship rather than religion. God’s love for all humankind. The message of the cross. Today Jesus shakes up our expectations of what it means to be a Christian with an honest reminder that Christians are cross bearers.

One of the most influential cross bearers of the 20th century died this past week. Rev. Billy Graham died on Wednesday at the age of 99. How many of you ever got to hear Rev. Graham in person? (I did back in college, although I think I went as much for the musicians as for Rev. Graham.) How many more remember watching one of his crusades on TV?

.. Over his many years of ministry, Graham preached to an estimated 110 million people in person at his crusades around the world, and that number nearly doubles to 215 million if one includes live audiences reached via satellite.

..Graham’s largest revival meeting occurred in March 1995 with his “Global Mission,” a technological marvel where 30 satellites broadcast taped messages from Graham in 116 languages to 185 countries (at a cost of $25 million).

 -Adelle Banks “Billy Graham…dies at Age 99” 2-21-18 ministrymatters.com

Rev Graham shared the message of the cross with the world, from presidents to cab drivers,

from politicians to the common man. He was honest with his temptations, and set boundaries on his life and association from finances to not dining with a woman alone other than his wife.

While not everyone agreed with his views, he has always been well respected.

Early in his career, in the 1950s, he risked everything by promoting integration at his crusades

in the southern states as well as South Africa. While some did not appreciate his ecumenical nature, Rev Graham never let differences get in the way of his love for all God’s people.

Grandson Ted wrote this week,

“What I will perhaps cherish most about Daddy Bill is that he taught me the meaning of humility. Toward the end of his life, one of his favorite Bible verses was,

“May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal. 6:14). The verse was typed out in large font and hanging in various places in his bedroom and bathroom. He recognized that his life and leadership was not about himself. In fact, he always felt uncomfortable when the focus of any conversation was himself or his accomplishments. More often than not, Daddy Bill shifted the subject away from himself

and toward Jesus.”

 -Boz Tchividjian “My Grandfather Billy Graham was My Hero” 2-21-18 washingtonpost.com

You and I are not Billy Graham, yet we, too, are called to be cross bearers, followers of Jesus in this world, in humility and integrity, honesty and grace. The world may think we are foolish for being honest about our faith. Yet that is who God has called us to be—followers of Jesus, bearing our crosses, living for Christ in our little spheres of influence.

As you continue on in this journey of Lent, may you prayerfully and intentionally become

an honest and faithful follower of Jesus Christ.