

September 12, 2021
Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Church of St. John the Evangelist, Elora
Proverbs 1:20-33, Psalm 16: 1-9, Mark 8:27-38
Homily - Canon Paul Walker

When Mark the evangelist locates Jesus at Caesarea Philippi to ask his disciples “Who do people say that I am?” and, “Who do you say that I am?”; and then has Jesus talking about the fact that as the Messiah he is going to Jerusalem to be handed over and killed, and then be raised from the dead; and then has Jesus talking to the crowds about the need for his followers to take up their cross and deny themselves, and even more, to lose their lives for the sake of the gospel in order to save it in the midst of this adulterous and sinful generation; Mark the evangelist is making a point that every real estate agent knows: location matters.

Caesarea Philippi is up in the north, at the headwaters of the Jordan River. It’s the Golan Heights, up the mountains, from where you can see present day Syria. It’s a beautiful place. The water here is cold, crisp and clear running over rocks; and the trees are tall and lush. It’s almost as beautiful as the Elora Conservation area. Historically, this was the place where child sacrifices were offered to Baal, the god of the Babylonians. So to locate Peter’s confession of Jesus as the Messiah at a place of bloodshed of innocent children - lambs led to the slaughter - and to have Jesus, the lamb of God, referencing his own bloodshed in Jerusalem, is a

powerful demonstration of reclaiming a land. Not only that, but to have Jesus associate himself with these innocent children who were slaughtered by saying that he too will be handed over and killed, is a powerful way to say that “I am one of them.”

It’s no wonder that Peter resists the thought of Jesus being led to the slaughter.

From a human perspective Peter was right to resist, but from a divine perspective, the perspective of wisdom, the Messiah needed to be handed over and killed in order to undo the curse of death. It was only God who had the power to undergo that experience and actually overcome the curse. So Jesus, as the anointed one, needed to enter into the depth of the curse itself, into the experience of the abandonment, condemnation, betrayal, and horrific violence and finally into the darkness of the sealed tomb in order to be able to ultimately undo it and leave it powerless. He is the only one who had the authority to do that.

And so, Jesus sets his face towards Jerusalem at the head waters of the Jordan River up in the mountains, and says, “Are you coming with me?”

“Well yes, we will follow you, Lord, where ever you go. After all who else has the words to eternal life?”

But soon they discover that no one *can* go with him. No one has the ability to go that far. No one else can be baptized into the death that he will be

baptized into. He alone will do this on his own. Everyone else will either abandon him, or watch from a distance as the sky turns black, the earth quakes, and he breathes his last, including his mother, Mary.

How long, how long, does wisdom cry out in the busiest corner of the city and at the entrance to the city gates, and not be heard? That's how our first reading begins from the book of Proverbs. The "wisdom" here is of course Jesus, the one who came into the world but the world did not receive him. They passed him by, they rejected him, they abandoned him.

But all the while, he was their salvation. He was the wisdom of the universe. He was the only one who in the darkness of that tomb could begin to see a glimmer of light, because he himself was the Light.

Yesterday we laid the cremated remains in the columbarium of a young man, Torry Harris, who died a year ago of an overdose. His niche is located right underneath his grandparents. Location matters.

Towards the end of his life he "found God" and he indicated a desire to be baptized, but sadly he never had the opportunity to do that. So his funeral yesterday became also symbolically his baptism.

We talked about the Pascal Candle, the Christ Candle, that comes out at baptisms and funerals, and burns throughout the season of Easter. I lit a baptismal candle and gave it to Torry's mother with



the words from the baptism service, "Receive the light of Christ, to show that you have passed from darkness into light." And she wept.

Today's psalm comes right out of the liturgy for the words of committal. Just before we lay any cremated remains to their resting place, we hear the closing words from today's psalm: "My heart therefore is glad, and my spirit rejoices, my body also shall rest in hope."

The only hope we have is found in Jesus, the author and pioneer of our faith, who ran before us to overcome the old order of sin and death, and to dissolve its power over our lives. As baptized people, we hold on to that hope, and we with Torry and all who went before us confess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection, and share with them in his eternal priesthood.

So, as baptized people let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works, and glory your Father in heaven.

Thanks be to God.

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