

Pentecost 16/Proper 19, September 13 2016 St. Augustine's in-the-Woods Freeland.  
Nigel Taber-Hamilton. Mark 8: 27-38

Anyone who's watched more than one horror movie automatically knows that you can always guarantee one thing: the folk we meet – the “victims” – will always make really bad choices! The movie audience knows what's going to happen, what's to cry out “no, don't open that door/don't run into the woods/don't....” well, you know! Don't do what we all know you're actually going to do, no matter what!

So characteristic is this that there's a TV commercial parodying the genre. Four teenagers are running, panicked in the dark, clearly being chased, and now lost in a forest. Then they discover – at last! – a house.....a really creepy house. One cries “Let's hide in the attic!” Another says “No, in the basement!” A third, pointing to a convertible with the top down, cries “Why can't we just get in the running car?” No one in any horror movie would ever select this eminently sensible option!

“Are you crazy?!” says another character, “Let's hide behind the chain saws!”

In Mark's gospel, we're that audience! We know the way this will work out; we know who Jesus is, *but no one else seems to know*. From the very beginning – the Gospel's opening line, we know that he's the Messiah, the Son of God. And yet we can see the Twelve male disciples act much like the characters in a horror movie – they never get it. The stories leading today's passage repeatedly emphasize this: in chapter 4 they ask: “who is this?” when any self-respecting disciple should have picked up on all the clues. In Chapter 6 they mistake Jesus for a ghost.

Now, when Peter gets an answer right, we breathe a sigh of relief. He didn't go in behind the chain saws, he didn't open that door with blood coming from under it. He got in the running car. All is well! You can almost hear Peter saying “Well, that's it then! He's the Messiah. End of Story. We can all go home now. Happily ever after. Etc. Etc.”!!

I guess what follows counts as stalling the getaway car! “Don't say those things, Jesus! Don't talk about suffering!” And our relief that he “got it” turns out to have been provisional, after all.

What Peter quickly learns (and, I think this is something we have continually to learn, too) is that grasping Jesus' identity is more than simply about getting the title right. Naming is not enough. Until it's too late – until the cock has crowed, Peter and the rest if the Twelve never get it, they never understand the reality behind the title. The Messiah's journey doesn't end the way Peter expects, nor the way that he wants. And we know, in this story, that in Jesus' lifetime, Peter and the other 11 actually never get that car running again, they never fully understand what it means to say that Jesus is the Messiah. They never fully understand the consequences.

Today's Gospel shows us Jesus wanting – desperately – to get that understanding (which clearly frightens him, too) across. Otherwise he's all alone. And haven't we had experiences of feeling all alone, wanting others to understand, to be with us?

Being the Chosen One is to make oneself a target. He is walking ahead of them into danger and

confrontation, not just in Jerusalem, but in every sermon, every town (and some of them throw him out). Mark tells us that here Jesus is urging the Twelve to understand that taking risks is part of being his follower.

Here, today, Jesus is trying to move his followers away from cautious protection and toward real cross-bearing. And that's ironic, considering how I began today. It turns out that this story really *is* a horror story – not some fake blood and a little trauma before everyone in the audience goes home alive, and in the knowledge that the stuff on the screen wasn't real. No, this really is a horror story, right down to the authentic torture, the authentic blood, and the authentic, honest-to-goodness agony and death.

At the center, then, is one highly appropriate word – in Latin, *Passio*, translated into English as Passion – Jesus' Passion. That word means: *suffering*. ***Passio is suffering.***

And not just Mark's gospel but all of the readings today are about suffering, suffering as a result of recognizing that genuine faith is about more than simply getting a name, a title, right. Suffering because of a recognition that we have to stand up for what we say we believe in, or our faith is hollow.

Jesus doesn't suffer and die because suffering is good. Suffering is a consequence of the way Jesus lives, as the result of a series of actions that pay no heed to social and religious norms, a life that reaches out to those who are ostracized (Mark 5:1-20), unclean (Mark 5:21-43), or marginalized (Mark 7:24-30).

That is, in part, what Isaiah is saying: Faithful roads will proceed through dark places. That means that to be faithful will require of us a sturdy trust in God – or we'll too easily end up like the seed spread on stony ground – with no root we'll wither and die spiritually, we'll become hollow husks of fully human people.

What we believe, what we place our trust in, has consequences – has to have consequences – or our faith is meaningless. We know the way things are, how they are supposed to go. If we believe God is active and that Jesus is alive in the world, then the question posed to us is not whether we confess Jesus as the Messiah. That's the easy part. We know what Jesus' title is; Mark has spelled it out for us. The question is this: do we understand what the title means? Do we grasp what's required of us, what the consequences of our faith are for our daily lives? Are we willing to accept those consequences and live into them? That's the 64 kazillion dollar question.....