

Gospel lesson

Just prior to this reading, Jesus cured a blind man, then asked the disciples as they traveled who people said he was. Peter said Jesus was the Messiah, and Jesus told him not to tell anyone about that.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/Lumo-jesus-disciples/>;
credit: LUMO

Mark 8:31-38 (NRSV)

³¹Then he began to teach them that 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.

³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

³³But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

³⁴He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

³⁵For 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.

³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?

³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?

³⁸Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

The word of God for the people of God

Interactive lesson



picture from

<https://www.pexels.com/photo/shallow-focus-photo-of-woman-leaning-on-doorway-3801394/>;

credit: Andrea Piacquadio

What sacrifices have you made recently?

<Let them respond>

Why did you make them? What was to gain?

<Let them respond>

Do you ever make a sacrifice for no reason, no gain?

<Let them respond>

I saw a portrayal once of someone burning money in a fire just because they did need it and felt like doing it. Have you ever known anyone to do that?

<Let them respond>

Do you think that wise? <Let them respond; mention waste of resources>

Do you think God ever makes sacrifices for no reason, wasting resources? <Let them respond>

What do you think is the most precious resource on this earth? <Let them respond>

In business, it is said that people are the most valuable resource. Do you think that is true (why/why not)? <Let them respond>

For most of us, the most precious things in life are family members. Would you sacrifice your life for them? <Let them respond>

What would it take for you to sacrifice the family member(s) you love most? <Let them respond>

God gave Jesus, the only Son of God, to suffer and die on a cross for us. Jesus gave Himself up to that for us, that we might live forever with Him. What does that say about how much God loves and cares for us? <Let them respond>

What are you willing to sacrifice for the sake of the gospel, to give God thanks for what Jesus did for us and to share that Good News with others?

<Let them respond>

I pray that this Lenten season you find a deeply meaningful way to express the love and gratitude that we profess for the Lord, that the glory of God's kingdom on earth may be multiplied through you.

<Hymn "Be Still, My Soul">

UMH #534>

Message: For the Sake of the Gospel



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/depths-of-love/second-sunday-in-lent-year-b-for-the-sake-of-the-gospel/second-sunday-in-lent-year-b-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Almighty God who sacrificed even Your own Son for us, as we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may better understand how to respond, so that all may experience Your grace and generosity. Amen.

“For the Sake of the Gospel” we continue exploring “Depths of Love” this Lenten season:

“If Ash Wednesday and the First Sunday in Lent set us off on our Lenten journey, this week we find out just what this journey will require of us.”

HELLO

my name is

picture from personal creation

When I filled out my application to be a pastor with the United Methodist Church, one of the questions was: What other names or aliases have you used? I did

not have much to put there; I published books under the pen name “Melanie Myrl;” I also had an online game avatar whose name I put down, “Awdz Bodkins,” though I had not really been playing it anymore and wound up ending my subscription to the game.

Many actors and actresses adopt screen names both to maintain privacy and to give audiences an easier way to remember them; most of you probably know Marilyn Monroe was originally named Norma Jean Baker. Name changes are often used in today’s society for a variety of reasons: to show a change in relationship status with someone (such as when married/divorced), for privacy (such as in witness protection), to signal a significant change (such as a transgender transition), to enable new opportunities (such as an immigrant taking a less ethnic name) and to make a statement (e.g., religious/political).

In the Old Testament, God gives people new names as a sign of blessing – and when God blesses, it is exceedingly generous. 99 year old Abram became the ancestor of a multitude – not just of individuals, but of nations. And what did Abram do to earn it? What would you do for a legacy like that?



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/jtjm-abraham1/>; credit: James Tissot (The Jewish Museum)

Right before the renaming, God shows up and tells

Abram, “walk before me, and be blameless.” So what does Abram do? “Abram fell on his face.” True to human heritage, he fails to do the simple thing that God tells him to do. And yet, God blesses him.

Why? Because God had a plan in mind, for a great people to show the world how awesome God is and how blessed we are when we live in the love of the Lord. God had a plan to restore humanity to the fullness of life lived in love, freed from the bonds of sin.

God wanted to bless him. And God wants to bless us. God knows us, what we are and what we can do. And God loves us, so when we trust our Creator and Savior, God makes us worthy of blessings by blessing us.

All Abram did was to have faith in God, that what God promised would come to pass; and so Abram accepted the blessing of becoming Abraham. Paul talks about how Abram’s faith “was reckoned to him as righteousness” – a reckoning for us as well.



picture screencaptured from
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQcynGHFjPY>; credit: LUMO

Peter thought he had faith; he had seen Jesus perform miracles and had even called Jesus the Messiah! But then Jesus started acting differently than Peter expected the Messiah would. Not telling people about Him? Well, OK, with the Romans around maybe they had

to get more support before revolting.

But then Jesus started talking about great suffering, getting rejected by the Jewish leadership (who would surely support the Messiah!), and getting killed. What kind of death wish was this? Rising again in three days - no way, no one had ever done that before! That was *permanently* dead, after 3 days!

So instead of trusting Jesus, Peter tried to be in control of the situation, tried to tell his Messiah privately how things had to be. And Jesus immediately rebuked him, publicly, so all there might understand - because you know it was not just Peter thinking that maybe Jesus was going nuts.

What would you do save your loved ones if they were deathly ill? Imagine you had, after exhausting all other options, made the difficult decision to sell everything you had and go into debt to pay for a cure - and then a friend who is broke tries to tell you that you are being irresponsible with your money. How would you respond to them?

Jesus makes the cost of discipleship clear. We need to trust God with everything that we are and have. When God calls us, speaks to us, guides us, it is to enable us to live more fully. Nothing anyone can own on this earth is worth more than the life God already offers us. So how do we respond? How do you respond?



picture from
<https://www.pexels.com/photo/gold-colored-cross-pendant-on-book-112990/>;
credit: George Becker

Some of us hear God and fall flat on our face, like Abram. We have a hard time wrapping our brains around the fact that God loves us and wants a relationship with us. But when we trust God, God blesses us, making an Abraham where there was just Abram before.

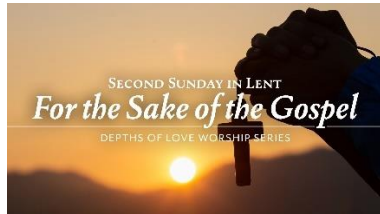
Some of us, like Peter, want to be in control. We think we see how things should be, and when God shows us a different path, we try to tell God to do things our way. Yet God has a way of making clear exactly who is in charge and calling us to what is right, sometimes much to our humiliation and chagrin.

So how do you respond? What would you do for the sake of the gospel? Are you willing to give up your comfortable seat, get up, and go show someone else what Jesus' love can mean for their life too? Are you willing to go beyond inconvenience and actually make a sacrifice of some of your comforts to enable others to know that God loves them and is calling them?

It does not have to start big; simply going to pick someone up and bring them to church – sacrificing time & gas to convince them to come with you – could be a good first step.

When trying to figure out the best response:

- † As always, first pause and pray; take time to listen to God.
- † Assess your stress – what is nagging/irking you, and WHY – where do you need to let God be in control?
- † Ask God for help in getting through/dealing with it – have faith in God’s wisdom and resources.
- † Trust God – and look for help from unlikely sources. The Holy Spirit may lead you down paths you never dreamed existed.
- † Let the Lord work through you (and others) for the health and glory of God’s kingdom on this earth.



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/depths-of-love/second-sunday-in-lent-year-b-for-the-sake-of-the-gospel/second-sunday-in-lent-year-b-graphics>

As Dr. Lisa Hancock¹ wrote, “Lenten travelers, we are not alone in our feelings about following Jesus as our Messiah. It is a hard road. The blessing is that we do not travel it alone.

“Thanks be to God that we share this journey with Jesus and one another as we lose our lives for the sake of the gospel to save our lives through Jesus, our Messiah. Amen.”

¹ Excerpted from Call to Worship on <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/depths-of-love/second-sunday-in-lent-year-b-for-the-sake-of-the-gospel/second-sunday-in-lent-year-b-liturgical-resources>, accessed 24Feb2024.