

**Worship for February 28, 2021**

**Second Sunday of Lent**

**Seminary Sunday/Church Vocations Sunday**

**Pastor John**

**Greeting/Musical Welcome**

Love is Greater than Fear (The Many)

**Call to Worship (unison)**

The good news of the gospel brings power to the people.

Among the ordinary and usual, divine possibilities await.

Even when we believe it is not so, we have so much to offer.

God calls us healers and prophets, teachers and companions.

God enables miracles among us.

In the hearts of the willing, Divine Love does dwell.

We gather and remember the power of God.

**Gathering Hymn - Just as I Am - New Century Hymnal #207**

Just as I am, without one plea but that your blood was shed for me,

And that you called inviting me, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

Just as I am, though tossed about with many a conflict, many a doubt,  
Fightings and fears within, without, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

Just as I am, you will receive, will welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;  
Because your promise I believe, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

Just as I am, your love unknown has broken every barrier down;  
Now to be yours, and yours alone, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

**Opening Prayer (unison)**

Holy One, in so many ways we have learned to downplay our potential. Both as individuals and as a community of faith. Letting others define our worth and capabilities, we then deny our own power. May your presence among us awaken and enliven all that you envision for us. That we may be faithful to you and to the generations to come. Amen.

## Scripture

**Mark 8:31-38** (from the Inclusive Language Lectionary)

*Mark speaks about the passion and teaches about discipleship.*

*And Jesus began to teach them that the Human One must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly. And Peter took Jesus, and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, Jesus rebuked Peter, and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not siding with God, but with humankind."*

*And Jesus summoned the multitude with the disciples, and said to them, "If any would come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who would save their life will lose it; and those who lose their life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what advantage is it, to gain the whole world and forfeit one's life? For what shall one give in return for one's life? For any who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them will the Human One also be ashamed, when the Human One comes in the glory of God with the holy angels."*

## Sermon

During this season of Lent, one question should dominate our thinking: “What does it mean to be a faithful disciple of Jesus?”

Frederick Buechner suggests that after his baptism, Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness asking himself the question of what it means to be Jesus, and that during Lent Christians are to ask in one way or another what it means to be Christians. In his gospel, Mark sets out to answer these questions.

Seems like before we can understand what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Messiah, we must understand what it meant for Jesus to be Messiah. It is the two questions that Jesus speaks to in our scripture read today.

Among first century Jews, the idea that the Messiah would deliver them from Roman oppression was prevalent, and Galilee was the hotbed of revolutionary activity.

W. Hulitt Gloer has this to say about it:

“Certainly no one expected a suffering and dying Messiah! Yet this is precisely what Jesus begins to teach his disciples at Caesarea Philippi. In verses 8:31-32a, Jesus announces that his destiny includes “great suffering,” rejection, and death, and while he also announces that he will rise again after three days, it appears that this important detail somehow goes unnoticed by the disciples. It is no wonder. At the mention of suffering, rejection, and death, all listening ceases! They can bear no more!

No need for a resurrection, for a Messiah would never suffer and die! Yet this is what Jesus is teaching in those verses. This is what messiahship means for Jesus.

Then Peter, who has just confessed Jesus to be the Messiah, rebukes Jesus! Imagine the scene. Peter walks over to Jesus, puts his arm around him, and takes him aside to set him straight about

messiahship. “Suffering, rejection, and death are NOT on the agenda. Prestige, power, and domination ARE the agenda. It’s David’s throne we’re after, ruling the nations with power and might. We signed on for a crown, not a cross!”

Jesus hears Peter out. Then, turning and looking at all the disciples, he rebukes Peter. And what a rebuke it is!

**Let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.**

Jesus speaks to the crowd as well as to his disciples. These are words for everyone who would be his follower then and now.

The cross was a vivid image in first century Palestine. It meant one thing: death, the cruel, tortuous death that awaited any who dared threaten Caesar’s kingdom. Indeed, the Romans put up crosses like bill boards advertising Caesar’s supremacy and the fate of any who dared to challenge it.

The season of Lent is structured as it is to remember in its fullness the journey of Jesus to the cross. It can also be a time for us to live out and explore the call of Jesus to discipleship. A time to contemplate not only the power of the cross of Christ, but the power inherent in taking up our own crosses too. Opportunities are daily before us, times when we may give our lives sacrificially to acts of love, compassion, justice, and peace, even in the face of the same imperial forces of sin and death that confronted Jesus.

I think we do sometimes find the very meaning of our lives, our voice or calling or passion when we pour ourselves out for others.

Jim Wallis wrote an article many years ago entitled “Faithful to the Truth”. It was about the journalist Penny Lernoux.

He says: “Penny was with us in Washington, D.C. as part of her national book tour for “People of God”. I introduced her as a journalist who tells the truth and keeps the faith. Penny wrestled with the questions of integrity. How do we find the strength of our convictions and the support of one another to say and do what is true? Notably, how do we persevere in vigorous truth telling in the face of opposition, intimidation, and threats? Penny loved the church enough to challenge it. She once wrote, “Guts—the courage to be different for Jesus’ sake—was what the early Christian church was about.”

Bastions of entrenched political, economic, and church power were often dealt serious blows by her writing. Penny could be counted on for finding the folks whose rights were being trampled on and whose rights were being destroyed. The perspective of a peasant was always more important to her than the perspective of a president. As a journalist, Penny practiced the Biblical bias for the poor. In all her writing she articulated the “cry of the people.” She once said, “At stake are two different visions of faith: the church of Caesar, powerful and rich, and the church of Christ, loving, poor, but spiritually rich.” As a journalist, in whatever subject she took on, she became an expert. But the vocation that she took most seriously was her vocation as a Christian. Her faith was truly at the center of her work and life. Though she was a great success in the journalistic and literary world, she measured her own success in terms of the gospel. She believed that “faith is lived out through service to the community—such service being an expression of deep spirituality.”

In the closing words of her last book, Penny leaves us with a call to faith:

The people of God will continue their march, despite the power plays. As a young Guatemalan said a few months before she was killed by the military, “What good is life unless you give it away? Unless you can give it for a better world, even if you never see that world, but have only carried your grain of sand to the building site.”

Penny certainly left her mark, her grain of sand, at the building site of a more just church and a transformed world. We can do the same...and it doesn't have to be done in a grand and glorious manner. Fred Craddock said many years ago (and perhaps it needs to be adjusted for inflation). “We think giving our all to the Lord is like taking a \$1,000 bill and laying it on the table. Here's my life, Lord, I'm giving it all. But the reality for most of us is that we are sent to the bank to cash in the \$1,000 for quarters. We go through life putting out 25 cents here and 50 cents there...usually giving our life to Christ isn't glorious. It's done in all those little acts of love and sharing...25 cents at a time.”

So as we take up our own crosses to walk with Jesus in paths of love and service this season of Lent, keep doling out those quarters. Refuse to let the pain that surrounds us to have the last word, or the power to structure our lives or define our existence. Get up and follow...quarters in hand..and maybe in the midst of the journey we discover who we really are—as beloved children of our God.  
Amen!

### **Pastoral Prayer/Lord's Prayer**

*Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins as we forgive those*

*who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation. But deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.*

*“With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to you; I will give thanks to your name, O Lord, for it is good.” (Psalm 54:6)*

During this time of isolation and need, the work of the church is more important than ever. For those who attend in person, there is a freewill offering plate at the back of the sanctuary. Please honor physical distancing and turn taking as you approach. Both pledge payments and freewill offerings are also still welcomed at:

**St. Paul’s UCC  
Attn: Julie Mathes  
115 S. Cedar St.  
Madrid, IA 50156**

**\*Offertory Response**

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow!  
Praise God, all creatures here below!  
Praise God above, ye heavenly host!  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost! Amen.**

**\*Offertory Prayer**

**Closing Hymn - Go, My Children, with My Blessing  
New Century Hymnal #82**

Go, my children, with my blessing, never alone;  
Waking, sleeping, I am with you, you are my own;  
In my love’s baptismal river I have made you mine forever,

Go, my children, with my blessing, you are my own.

Go, my children, fed and nourished, closer to me;  
Grow in love and love by serving, joyful and free.  
Here my Spirit's power filled you, here with tender comfort stilled you;  
Go, my children, fed and nourished, joyful and free.

### **Blessing/Benediction**

With faith, remember the good news: the Spirit of Christ accompanies us. This is not an abstract claim. This is a promise that God still takes on flesh. When we act out of our Sacred potential, Christ is alive in our depths, our flesh, our communities of faith. So let us go emboldened, encouraged, and assured - the power of God lives in us. May it be so.

The Lord bless and keep you  
The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you  
The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

The peace of the earth be with you  
The peace of the heavens too  
The peace of the rivers by with you  
The peace of the oceans too  
Deep peace falling over you  
God's peace growing in you

### **Closing Announcements**