
Mark 8: 27-38 Love and Suffering

Jesus came to love. That was – and is – His essential mission
– not to die, not to suffer but to love.

& if it should be - as our Lord knew it would be-
that loving involved suffering, He would not stop loving.

There, in the north of Israel, with His friends, Jesus confirmed that choice & that
commitment. & it is this that I want to focus on today.

.. Today I am mindful of Christians in Afghanistan & in so many countries, who
are now suffering for their faith; for those who mourn the loss of those who died in
9/11 & in all the conflicts, terrorism & hate-filled violence since; for those who
mourn the loss of loved ones; for those who have watched others live with pain & die;
for those, who now are living with illness, fear and pain.

From then on, in Mark's short account of Jesus' 3 years of ministry,
he records Jesus worked mainly with the 12 closest disciples rather than with crowds;
& He began to teach them deeper truths than they had known before –

.....that God is *Abba*, about prayer, & humility, & service

... & how the way of love may be the way of the cross.

But they were as resistant as we are clinging to old ideas.

If you love someone, you lay yourself wide open to being hurt:

..... love & vulnerability & suffering are intermingled.

Jesus was speaking to His disciples about suffering for the sake of God's Kingdom

....but His insights are relevant also to all our pain & hurt.

... Jesus acknowledged the inescapable fact of suffering.

..... On behalf of others He confronted & challenged & healed it;

... for Himself He would not avoid or evade it.

Watch how He dealt with it: *Keep your eyes on me*, he said.

. When it became inevitable that He would die, He accepted it, still trusting the Father.

Through the suffering He accepted, Jesus broke the final power of evil over us & all
who will trust in Him. Following Jesus also means that we do not suffer alone but
that our Lord is with us.

Somehow, He seemed to absorb the suffering in himself.

.. We often make others suffer for our own hurt;

....we find it hard to bear our pains & take it out on someone else;

.. that's not the way of Jesus.

The way of Love may become the way of the cross but it is the way of Life.

When you open your mouth – Taming the Tongue *James 3: 1-12*

James did not mince his words: watch what we say. & he had a particular warning for those who presume to be preachers; we will be more severely judged! Though he does recognise that we all stumble at times & no one is perfect in every respect!

Peter's encounter with Jesus, recorded in Mark 8: 27-38 is an example of just how easy it is to switch between telling the truth with our tongue as he answered "*You are the Christ!*" & then, speaking in error as he tried to dissuade Jesus from travelling to Jerusalem to fulfil God's purpose. **So it is for us with our tongues** – able to praise God & build up but also able to dishonour, deny & damage.

So James asks us to picture 2 small things with the power to control: 1. **bits** in the mouth to make horses obey the rider; you may have admired the harmony between horse & rider in the recent Olympic & Paralympic Equestrian events, not just the dressage. & 2, **rudders** to sheer ships & boats of all sizes even in strong winds. (This was James, the wee brother of Jesus, not the one, the son of Zebedee, who was a fisherman by trade but he still would have known of the danger of sudden storms that blew up on the inland lake Galilee.) So too, the tongue is a small part of the body but capable of amazingly powerful & damaging outbursts. Like **the small spark that sets a forest on fire** – something we're more aware of across the world over recent years. Our own wrong use of words can also be so destructive. We must take responsibility to watch what we say. *It only takes a spark remember to set off a forest fire: a careless or wrongly placed word out of your mouth can do that. By our speech we can ruin the world, turn harmony to chaos, through mud on a reputation, send the whole world up in smoke and go up in smoke with it. This is scary; you can tame a tiger but you can't claim a tongue- it's never been done.* (James 3: 5-7 - Message)

& like a **polluted or stagnant water source, so often some of what we may say fails to reflect the love of Christ.** & also today in what we may say or respond in a **hasty text, e-mail or social media comment!**

So what can do? 1. James 3: 1-2 Self-control – that may come with practice, will & effort; getting our talk right leads to right actions & right living. & pray / ask the Lord for this. 2 Timothy 1:7 ***For God did not give us a spirit of timidity but of love & of power & of self-control.*** Self-control is a gift & fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23) & like what Jesus was teaching **Peter in Mark 8: 27-38, let us focus on Jesus,** recognising just who Jesus is & trusting Him for our life; our past, for all we struggle with in the present, & for our future & for always, deliberately living your life for Jesus – in action & in words. Sing: *May the mind of Christ my Saviour live in me from day to day, by His love and power controlling all I do or day..*