

**Heartbreak and the Holy One**  
**St. Charles Avenue Baptist Church**  
**Prepared by Rev. Tim Moon**  
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Peter truly is the rollercoaster disciple, always up and down. He is both the first person to get it and the first one to completely miss it, and in today's passage, he does both in the matter of 3 verses. Mark's account has been building toward this pivotal moment where Peter says, "you are the Christ." This is the first time a disciple has recognized Jesus as the Messiah, but by verse 30, Jesus tells him to "Get behind me, Satan!" So what happened to take Peter from this beautiful moment of insight to Jesus rebuking him?

As Peter declares Jesus the Messiah, there is undoubtedly excitement swarming amongst the disciples. As 1<sup>st</sup> century Israelites, this is what they had been waiting for. In this confession, Peter's words carry the weight of Israel's years of suffering. They longed for a savior king to protect them, restore them, and return them to a former glory. They have waited for the Messiah coming from the line of David. And as quickly as Peter has this "aha" moment, Jesus redefines the term. In verses 31 and 32, Jesus first tells his disciples that being Messiah includes his impending suffering, rejection, death, and resurrection.

As Jesus predicts his fate, Peter must be crushed. At the heart of this interaction are expectations unmet and the heartbreak that comes with that realization. Peter can't stand to envision this fate for his teacher, his fishing buddy, and his friend. As modern readers of Mark, we know how the story ends, but can you imagine how shocking Jesus' passion prediction is for the disciples? No, no, no, the Messiah is supposed to save us from the Roman empire, not lay down before it.

So, is it ok to say that God breaks our hearts sometimes? Is there room in our faith to say God doesn't always meet our expectations? I think God can handle the weight of our unmet expectations and ensuing heartbreak, and we seem to be in good company with Peter.

Pastor David Lose says, “we are not wrong to wonder where God is when we learn our beautiful child has autism, our beloved partner is sick unto death, our prized relationship has crumbled, our dream job – and with it so much of our identity – has been eliminated, or when any number of other disappointments and disasters fall upon us.”<sup>1</sup>

In fact, I would go so far to say that God will break our hearts, or at least our finite understanding of God will break our hearts. And I think we miss something when we don’t grieve this. We must grieve that we don’t understand the situation. We must grieve that we can’t always make sense of suffering. We must grieve that we don’t always understand God’s ways. And in our daily lives, we grieve a loss of our plan for the future. We grieve in the misunderstandings. We grieve out of fear, disappointment, humiliation, anger, loss, whatever it is. As humans, we grieve.

God understands our grief, but grieving takes time doesn’t it? We don’t just get over heartbreak in a flash. As Peter absorbs the passion prediction, he must be filled with grief, disappointment, and fear, and he decides that he has a perfectly logical solution. While we don’t know exactly what Peter says to Jesus, we can imagine. I picture Peter saying “Jesus, let’s be cool man. I feel like you didn’t get enough sleep last night because you are talking crazy. There’s no need for this suffering and death business because there is a much easier way. You are the Messiah, and you can do whatever you want. How about we go to Jerusalem, you take care of the pesky Romans, and you can become king of Israel. We can even build a palace back near home, so we can still go fishing in the Sea of Galilee. And when we are all in our 70s, we can laugh about the time you said you needed to suffer and die. Doesn’t that sound nice, Jesus?”

Peter’s vision does sound easy and gentle and safe. Isn’t that what happens when we are grieving a heartbreak? We deny the reality before us and come up with other solutions. No sooner than he gets the words out of his mouth, Jesus rebukes him “Get behind me

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<sup>1</sup> David Lose. “Disappointed with God.” *Working Preacher*, February 26, 2012, accessed February 25, 2015, <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=1565>

Satan!” Two things are happening in Jesus’ response. By assuming he knows more than Jesus, Peter tries to make the shift from disciple to teacher, and Jesus’ assertion to “get behind me” is a reminder for Peter to fall back into his role as disciple. Secondly, Jesus uses the word “Satan,” which is the more disturbing portion of the rebuke. It does not appear that Jesus is calling Peter the evil one or suggesting that he is possessed by the devil. Instead, it seems Jesus is describing Peter’s action as a tempter, or adversary.<sup>2</sup>

Without a doubt Jesus must have been tempted by Peter’s words. With ease, Jesus could have taken on the mantle of Messiah in the way Peter and the disciples hoped. But Jesus points out Peter’s central misunderstanding, “you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

God is going to break our hearts, but this may be less about God and more about our visions of God. Might it be that we see a bit of Peter in ourselves? Might it be that we each craft our own version of God? Might it be that we each craft our own version of how are lives are supposed to turn out?

It would be convenient to have a God that thinks like us, acts like us, and believes like us. Wouldn’t we love if finding God was like a visit to the Build-a-bear store where we could choose which attributes God would have. “Oh yes, I would like my God with one part happiness, and a dash of warm feelings. Oh how fun, I can choose Republican or Democrat God. I can choose liberal or conservative God. No way, I can even choose male or female God.” But when we begin choosing who God is going to be for us, it begins to feel like we are the ones trying to be God. And this is what Peter does in the text. He tries to play God because he prefers his vision to Jesus’.

But at some point, we are reminded, like Peter, that our human conceptions of God are too small a vision. We realize God is the God of both the Republicans and the Democrats, God’s the God of both the liberal and conservative, God’s the God of both justice and mercy,

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<sup>2</sup> Lamar Williamson, *Mark: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press), 2009, 153.

God's the God of both the rich and the poor, God is the God of both the our friends and our enemies, God is the God of me and the God of you. We feel comfortable with God when we get to choose the box that we place God in, but we get nervous when we think about how God doesn't match up with all of our beliefs or conveniences. We love the "I am the light of the world" Jesus, but we don't prefer to think about the implications of the "suffering servant" Jesus, yet we are called to follow both.

So in verse 34, when Jesus says to "deny ourselves," he is telling us what it means to be a disciple. Maybe being a disciple means laying down our limited views of who God is, and embracing the mystery. Maybe being a disciple means laying down our view of who we think God should be, grieving that loss, and making room for a broader understanding. And being a disciple means that we are continually seeking and growing. The book of Mark is filled with the disciples having both moments of missing the point and beautiful brilliance in their journey of faith. And as each of us travel the path of faith, who we say God is, and who we believe God is matters because it informs how we live in the world.

The season of Lent, in particular, calls us, as followers of the way of Jesus, to look within ourselves, and part of this inner journey is to be honest about who we think God is. Lent is a time to deal with tough questions. It is a time to let go of our expectations of who God is and open our minds to a broader understanding of the One we follow.

And as we grieve the heartbreak of unmet expectations, may we realize that we always have more to learn about who God is. David Lose says, "in Jesus and his cross and resurrection we discover, not the God we may want, but the God that we desperately need."<sup>3</sup> St. Charles Avenue Baptist Church, may we open ourselves to the God our weakness, and our suffering. The God who suffers and grieves with us, and the God who redeems us there.

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<sup>3</sup> Lose.

## Works Referenced

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