

February 26, 2017
Matthew 16.13-17.9
Benjamin A. Loven

We have spent the past two months in worship hearing stories that reveal who Jesus is, that reveal Jesus' true character to us.

A few weeks ago, in the story of his testing in the wilderness, we heard that even though Jesus *is* God's Son, he will *not* use his authority to benefit himself...

And before that, in the story of his baptism, we heard that Jesus has come to call us to unexpected, perhaps even unwelcomed, ministry opportunities...

And just last week, we heard that Jesus is a heart-breaker, the one who has come to break open the stone of our hearts, filling them with the spirit of his love.

Which brings us to our story this morning.

After this string of revelations, Jesus asked his disciples: "Who do *you* say that I am?"

He wanted to know if they had been paying attention, if any of this had sunken in.

Peter, in a fervor of faithfulness, blurted out, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

Jesus was elated! Peter got it!

All of his hard work had *not* been in vain!

“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven!”

Peter got it!

Confident that his disciples were on the right path, Jesus revealed *more* to them: “From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”

He began to reveal what being the Messiah *truly* meant.

Because Jesus *is* the Messiah, God’s Promised-One...but that meant something different than what people had been expecting.

They, *including* the disciples, were expecting the Messiah to be a great king, a warrior king like David, one who by strength of arms would defeat all of Israel’s

enemies, kick out the Romans, reform religious practices, right all of society's wrongs... and do it all by next Tuesday!

But that's *not* the kind of Messiah Jesus is. Jesus revealed that he was *not* going to Jerusalem to wrest control from Rome...rather, he was going to suffer greatly and then to be killed...

No armies, no victories, no righteous anger, no glory ...just suffering and death...

But Peter, faithful Peter, blessed Peter, the rock upon which Christ will build the church, didn't want to hear that; it didn't fit into *his* narrative about the Messiah.

“God forbid *it*, Lord! This must *never* happen to you!”

Oh Peter; so close, and yet so far away.

In an *instant* Jesus' elation was gone, replaced with disappointment as he realized that Peter didn't *actually* understand *anything*.

“Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

But, all is not yet lost; there’s still hope, because this is *not* the end of our story!

A little while after Peter’s debacle, Jesus took him (and James and John) up a mountain, and there on top of the mountain Jesus was transfigured: his clothes became dazzling white and his face shone like the sun.

Suddenly Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus, talking with him.

And poor Peter just couldn’t help himself, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”

So close, and yet so far away.

Peter’s missed the point again.

Jesus had been talking about what it means to be the Messiah, that his path is the way of the cross, of giving up himself for the sake of the world, of putting aside ideas of honor and glory and might, choosing instead to suffer and die.

But Peter didn't hear *any* of this.

As soon as he saw this vision of majesty, of Jesus in his heavenly glory, joined by Moses and Elijah, those legendary faith heroes from Israel's past, Peter couldn't *wait* to stay there!

They didn't need to bother with going to Jerusalem to face execution; they could just stay here, on the mountain top, surrounded by visions of grandeur!

While Peter was lost in flights of fancy, a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice boomed out, echoing words first heard at Jesus' baptism, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased;" But *this* time there's an extra bit tacked on to the end: "*listen* to him!"

As I mentioned earlier, since Christmas we've heard stories that have revealed Jesus' identity to us, that have shown us his true character.

So what has been revealed today?

It's that Jesus never gives up on us.

After Peter confessed that Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus revealed more about what it *means* to be the messiah.

But then Peter messed up. He didn't want Jesus' version of the messiah, he wanted his own.

But Jesus stopped Peter cold: "Get behind me Satan!"

However, this didn't stop Jesus from trying again; he took Peter with him as he went up the mountain to meet with Moses and Elijah.

But *again*, Peter messed up. He got distracted by the glory and the majesty of the situation, forgetting everything that Jesus had been telling him about the Messiah.

And *again*, Peter was stopped cold, although *this* time it was with the booming voice of the Father, "This is my Son, the Beloved...*listen* to him!"

But even *this* didn't stop Jesus from trying yet again.

He went over to his cowering disciples, touched them and said, "Get up and do not be afraid."

Brothers and sisters in Christ, Jesus will *never* give up...on us.

There *are* times when we *understand* who God is, when we *understand* what this faith-thing is all about, when we *understand* what it *means* to be a follower of Jesus.

But then, like Peter, we mess up. We forget that the Messiah's path is the way of the *cross*. We forget that Jesus is *not* interested in glory and honor and majesty and power. We forget that Jesus did *not* come to be a warrior king, riding victorious as his armies crush all who would resist him.

But just because *we* forget does not mean that *God* will forget the promises he made to us. Jesus will *never* give up...on us.

So “get up and do *not* be afraid.”