

“With Purpose, On Purpose”

Liturgical Date: Lent 2 (B)

Primary Text: St. Mark 8:27-38

Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. The primary text for today, the Second Sunday in Lent, is the Holy Gospel from St. Mark Chapter 8. The title of the sermon is, “With Purpose, On Purpose.” JESUS IS MOVING WITH PURPOSE TOWARD THE CULMINATION OF HIS EARTHLY MINISTRY SO THAT WE WOULD BE SAVED.

I am the kind of person that likes to move around a lot. My wife sometimes tells me I am like a “caged lion” as I just walk back and forth around the house. When I get up in the morning it takes my brain a little while to start working right, so I often find myself just wandering around thinking about what I need to do to get ready for the day. But often times I am moving pretty fast toward a specific destination. At church you may see me going fast to point “A” to point “B”. My co-workers definitely see me doing this in the hallways of our school. Part of the reason for this is that I am often so busy, I have to move quick, and another part of it is that I just don’t like to waste time. In fact, if I ever stop moving or talking, I have been known to fall asleep pretty much anywhere. My brother once described me as like a shark, either moving or sleeping. Usually, when I am headed somewhere, I am going there with a purpose, on purpose.

What about you? Do you have a purpose? Often times when we have a specific goal, we move with a purpose. Because to get to a goal, to accomplish something, it requires action. If you want to get somewhere, well, you have to get up and get there. If you want to get in better shape, you have to exercise. If you want to gain more knowledge about a topic, you need to study it. If you want to

make more money, you have to work for it. And so on. To fulfill your purpose, you have to do so on purpose.

As I have mentioned a few times already this Church Year, the Gospel of Mark is a Gospel of Action. It moves very quickly. And Jesus had a goal, a purpose, a destination, did He not? In today's Gospel Reading we see Jesus bring that forward very clearly. From this point on in the Gospel of Mark we see Jesus moving toward that purpose, on purpose, very diligently and directly.

Verse 27 begins with Jesus moving as He "went out". He comes into the towns of Caesarea Philippi, and he asks His disciples a couple of questions. He first asks them, "*Whom do men say that I am?*" They answer Jesus by saying John the Baptist, as some believed that Jesus was John come back from the dead. They tell Him that others say that He is Elijah or one of the Old Testament prophets come back to bring an important message. And in verse 29, Jesus makes the question more direct and personal, "*But whom say ye that I am?*" Ok. They have relayed to Jesus what others were saying, but what did they think? They had been hearing Him preach and teach and seeing Him perform miracles for some time now. Just who do they think Jesus is? It is the bold one, the one Jesus called the "rock" that answers. In fact, Peter will speak up for the group twice in our reading for today, with very different reactions from Jesus. Peter gives a great answer to Jesus' question, in fact it is a confession of faith, "*Thou art the Christ.*" This fairly brief statement is very powerful. Peter is saying that Jesus is the Messiah. He believes that all that they had been looking for in this promised one is being fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. In St. Matthew's Gospel it is made clear that Peter did not just come up with this on his own, it was revealed to Him by the Holy Spirit. Thus it is whenever someone makes a confession of faith in Jesus it is not done by their own power or intellect, but only by the work of the Holy Ghost.

But then in verse 31, Jesus throws the Disciples for a bit of a loop. *“And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.”* What? If Jesus is the Messiah, why must He suffer? Why would He be rejected by the leaders of Judaism who should know when the Messiah arrives? And the Messiah would be killed? That doesn’t sound too victorious. That is not what people were expecting out of the Messiah in that He would be rejected and killed, they thought He would liberate, free, and prosper Israel. But notice that Jesus also said that He would rise again after three days. But it is almost as if the Disciples don’t even really hear that part after being shocked by what their rabbi was saying before that.

And again, it is Peter that speaks up. Peter rebuked what Jesus was saying. Essentially, Peter is saying, “Oh no, Jesus. You are the Messiah. We are not going to let it go down like that.” And Jesus response to Peter, *“Get thee behind me Satan: for thou savourest not the things of God, but the things that be of men.”* The rapid turn of events is almost comical, isn’t it? Peter, who just a few verses before is so highly commended by Jesus for His correct and bold confession, is now called “Satan” and told to get out of Jesus way!

Why? Because by Peter objecting to Jesus’ suffering and dying (and rising, but again he seemed to miss that part) he is trying to thwart the purpose of Jesus coming. Peter, nor the other Disciples at this point, understand fully what the mission of Jesus is all about. His purpose was to come and fulfill the Law, suffering at the hands of sinful men. He must suffer, bleed, and die to save people from their sins. He would be the perfect sacrifice, the Lamb of God, that would pay the ultimate price and make atonement for the sins of the world. This was His purpose, and Jesus is moving, on purpose, to the culmination of that mission. Of course, Peter is not literally Satan. But by Peter wanting to stop Jesus from His

purpose, He would be doing exactly what would benefit the devil-by stopping the salvation of humankind. We must also note that as St. Matthew tells us in his parallel account when Peter made the confession of faith in Jesus as Messiah, this is the work of the Spirit. He could only understand and confess the truth by a work of God. When Peter rebukes Jesus for saying He will suffer and die He is speaking from his own sinful nature. This is a lesson for us. We can only have faith by a work of God the Holy Spirit, and we are lost only by the works of our sinful and fallen nature.

In the very next chapter of Mark, Peter along with James and John will experience the Transfiguration-which I preached about a couple of weeks ago. Everything that Jesus had said and done up to that point is validated by that mountaintop experience, which will include the voice of God the Father proclaiming that Jesus is His Son and doing pleasing work. Jesus had a purpose, and He was fulfilling that purpose on purpose, with a purpose.

Now back to our purpose. Are we, are you, moving with a purpose on purpose? Of course, as believers in Jesus Christ, our purpose is to have saving faith and to worship and glorify God forever. In this we move toward our eternal home of heaven. And along the way we are to preach the Gospel to a lost and dying world.

But what about before we reach death or experience the Second Coming of Christ and transition to the eternal kingdom? We don't want to be so single-minded on reaching eternity with all of its great blessings and freedom from suffering and pain that we miss those along the way that God has put in our path. And our traveling along the "straight and narrow" is not always going to be easy.

As Jesus said in the Gospel text in verse 34, "*Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.*" Verse 35, "*For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my*

sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it." Verse 36, "*What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?*" We are not to be ashamed of Jesus, but to proclaim and live for Him with purpose.

During this season of Lent, many people often focus on fasting, giving up something they like or find pleasurable. There is more of a focus on increasing our time in prayer, of a deeper repentance. There is even a focus on how we can help the less fortunate among us. But we all know that we should not be *only* doing these things during Lent.

Our purpose, our mission, as we move toward eternity is to love our neighbor as ourselves. As Martin Luther said, "*God does not need your good works, but your neighbor does.*" To really follow Jesus, to take up our cross involves loving and serving our neighbor. How can we do that? Of course we can serve in the church, there are always things to help with in the local congregation. But there are also many outside of these walls and this fellowship in need. Whether it be help with food, shelter, medical care, donating blood, teaching an English class to a new arrival to our country, speaking up for those that need an advocate, and we could go on and on because the needs are endless. God has called you to serve. You may not get accolades or awards, but God knows.

A research firm once did an interesting study. Over the course of a few months, they read through over 2,000 obituaries. They looked for common words that were chosen to describe the deceased. Can you guess what the most common word was in those obituaries? Help. It was help. It seems that people wanted their loved ones who had passed on to be most remembered as people who helped others. Interesting. As Christians, we can certainly help in many ways.

Jesus helped people. But He did much more than that. He saved people. He saved us. He did what no one else could do: keep the Law perfectly in our place, suffer and die to pay for our sins, and then rise from the grave in victory over sin,

death, and the devil. That was His purpose. And He fulfilled that with purpose.
And thanks be to God that He did.

The peace of God, that passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds
in Christ Jesus.

Amen.