



ST. MICHAEL'S SERMONS

Greenville, SC

Lent 2 – March 12, 2006

Mark 8:31-38

FOLLOW ME?!

"Follow Me!"

It is a *question*: Follow Me?

It is a *commandment*: Follow Me!

This morning's Gospel reading, this 2nd Sunday in Lent, 2006, puts before us BOTH the QUESTION and the COMMANDMENT! And the punctuation of the sermon title reminds us that the question and the commandment usually come to us wrapped up together! This is the very center section of Mark's Gospel! It is the fulcrum! The balance point! The turning point! The **forceful, formidable faith point** – for Peter! And for us!

Jesus has just asked the disciples: "Who do men say that I am?"

And then: "But you?"

"Who do you say that I am?"

And Peter has answered for each and every one of us who has seen or even sensed His Power and His Authority at work:

"You are the Christ!"

"The Son of the Living God!"

"And now Jesus begins to teach them the Truth

"That the Son of Man must undergo great suffering and be rejected by the elders,
the chief priest, and the scribes,

"And be killed ~ and after 3 days rise again!"

Mark wisely says: "Jesus **begins** to teach them..." Because the learning goes on! Twice more in this center section Jesus says the same thing quite openly – because it is a life-long learning for them! Because it is a life-long learning for us! Because Jesus is still teaching us the same lesson!

And Peter again speaks for you and for me when He rebukes Jesus!

"Such suffering does not befit God's Anointed One!"

And Jesus rebukes Peter:

"Get behind Me!" Follow after Me! Stay in line behind Me!

"Satan" The name is actually a Hebrew verb to Test or Tempt! Thus comes the commandment: "Follow Me!" The clear & compelling re-orientation of Life for disciples! – Peter being the pre-eminent exemplary disciple! Thus comes the commandment! And then comes the question: Jesus calls the crowd with His Disciples...the world along with the Church! He teaches all of us together! He still teaches all of us together!

"If any want to become My followers..." Literally, "If any person wishes to come after me ..." It's the same word as behind me! It's the same place Jesus puts Peter! And here it is a question: Follow Me?

Do you want to follow Me?

Do you wish to come after Me?

Do you desire to walk My way?

It is the most important question Jesus ever asks! Because it is the **forceful, formidable fulcrum of faith!**

Please note carefully: **Jesus does not ask** ~

Do you want to be a member of the Church?

Do you want to be part of a program Church? Or a Pastoral Church? Or a Patriarchal Church?

Do you want to be Lutheran?

Do you want a high-tech nursery? Or a low-tech nursery? Or a certain kind of music?

Jesus does not ask:

Do you **want** an intern?

Do you **not** want an intern?

Do you **understand** everything I say?

Do you **agree** with everything I say?

Jesus simply and clearly asks: "Do you want to follow me?"

Do you want to set your mind on divine things? Or on human things?

It is the most important question Jesus ever asks! And it is the most important answer Jesus ever gives:

"Let this person deny themselves! Take up his or her cross! And follow me!"

Deny your self! Move your self out of the center of the universe! Allow God to become the center of the universe for you! Persist in doing this! Because your ego will persist in moving itself back into the center!

Take up your Cross! Not Jesus' Cross! That's already been done! Your cross! Not the "*Slings and Arrows of Outrageous Fortune*" which Life lays upon us! But the Cross you choose to TAKE UP! Because you **can!** Because **you** can! Because you want to follow Jesus! Because Jesus leads you to do this specific act of loving service for someone who cannot do it for themselves!

Follow me! I am the way! I will show you the way! Stay in line! Do not step out from behind me!

Keep on following me! Keep on learning from me!

Thus Jesus begins again and again teaching us! It is the most important question Jesus ever asks! And Jesus keeps on asking the question because Jesus knows you and I keep on needing to answer the question! And it is the most important answer Jesus ever gives ~ this design for discipleship! Because it ushers us into the Mystery and the Meaning of the Cross itself: Namely that this God of Grace and Glory who calls and gathers, blesses and keeps us is present & powerful precisely in the places it seems He is not! ~ working to save us!

We've started something new in Confirmation Class this year! We've always started class by sharing our highs and lows for the week and then praying together.

It builds community. It enables them to experience being Church for each other. Confirmation is not just about learning stuff. It's about being and becoming the Church. Because if they experience church at this point in their lives, they will always remember and seek out Church. Well, this year before we pray, I turn to the person on my right or my left and make the sign of the Cross on their forehead or in their palm. And I say: MAY GOD BLESS YOU AND KEEP YOU IN YOUR HIGHS AND YOUR LOWS.

MAY GOD BLESS YOU AND KEEP YOU IN YOUR HIGHS AND YOUR LOWS.

And it goes around the table until it comes back to me.

I hope each of you today will turn to the person beside you and bless them in this way. The imprint of this Cross remains in the flesh of the giver and the receiver – the blessing and the blessed! That's what it means to be and to become the Church beneath the Cross!

May God bless and keep you in your highs and your lows! Those who want to save their life will lose it! And those who lose it for My Sake and for the sake of the Gospel will save it!

Follow Me?

Follow Me!

Follow Me!

AMEN.