

Pentecost 17b – September 16, 2018
Mark 8.27-38

“Inconceivable. You keep using that word.

I do not think that it means what you think it means.”

Any of you know this movie line?

This is one of the best-known lines from the movie, *The Princess Bride*.

One of the characters, Vizzini, keeps saying “Inconceivable!”

every time something happens that he doesn’t expect.

Finally, Inigo Montoya calls him on it:

“You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means.”

I kept having that movie line run through my head as I pondered this morning’s gospel.

Jesus is talking to his disciples about who people think that he is.

The disciples offer up various responses

that are popular at the time and then Jesus asks:

but who do *you* say that I am?

And Peter gives his bold response: “You are the Christ.”

But we quickly learned that that word may not mean what Peter thinks it means.

Jesus tell his disciples that he must undergo great suffering,

that he will be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes,
that he will be killed, and that after three days he will rise again.

I can almost hear Peter saying: But you are the Christ.

You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means.

And as if Peter knows better than Jesus

what it means to be the Christ, the anointed, chosen one of God,
Peter takes Jesus aside and rebukes him.

Peter rebukes Jesus! Almost saying: You keep using that word – Christ –

but I do not think it means what you think it means.

And before we get too frustrated with Peter,

we should pause and think for a moment about

whether we too strive to tell Jesus what it means for him to be the Christ.

Jesus then rebukes Peter, reminding him that clearly

Jesus the Christ does **not** mean what Peter thinks it means.

I often think that Jesus the Christ does not mean what we think it means either.

I think too often we want to put Jesus in a box of our own making.

We want to paint Jesus with a brush, so he looks like what we think he should look like –
maybe like that famous painting

where Jesus has long, flowing brownish-blond hair, blue eyes,
very European features. You know what I mean?

But as a brown-skinned Palestinian Jew, Jesus didn't look like that.

Or we think that Jesus should always be conforming to our own agenda,
as if we get to tell God what to do rather than the other way around!

Some I know even think that Christ is simply Jesus' last name,
and they do not realize that "Christ" describes who Jesus is for all humanity.

God's anointed and chosen one
who makes God known to us,
who is God's own self present with us.

Often, we want to make Jesus simply into a nice man who was kind to people,
like the goodly shepherd who is simply loving and caring,
who never gets frustrated, who never gets angry,
who never expects too much from us.

So often we, like Peter, think we have Jesus all figured out.

We have this whole Christ thing down.

And we have figured out exactly what it means to follow Jesus.

Jesus the Christ. We keep using that word,

but I do not think it means what we think it means.

What it means for Jesus to be the Christ, the Messiah, the chosen and anointed one of God
is that he will suffer, that he will be rejected,
that he will be killed, and that he will rise on the third day.

And what that means for us is that Jesus is life.

Jesus is forgiveness, love, mercy, peace, compassion, our sure and certain hope.

That Jesus is God with us.

That Jesus turns the world completely upside down,

or maybe it's better to stay right side up.

That Jesus is the Holy One of God, God's only son,

whom God has sent to the world in order to reconcile us to God,

to make us one with God and to make us one with each other.

Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.

Jesus is the heart of the Gospel.

Jesus is the very presence of God with us,

making God known to us and making us known to God.

I can imagine the meme Jesus would come up with:

Christ. You keep using that word.

I do not think it means what you think it means.

Jesus the Christ. We keep using that word

but sometimes I do not think it means what we think it means.

I also think sometimes we say we follow Jesus

but sometimes following Jesus does not mean what we think it means.

Jesus tells us that following him is not easy,

that we have to put our mind on divine things and not on human things,

on God's ways rather than on humanity's ways.

That we need to deny ourselves and take up the cross.

Jesus just told us what it means for him to take up the cross –

great suffering, rejection, death, and resurrection.

So, taking up the cross means that for us too.

We have to be willing, as Jesus was, to suffer,

to be ridiculed and rejected, maybe even to die for following Jesus.

Jesus says that it does no good for us to gain the whole world

because in doing so we forfeit our very lives.

Jesus says that we must lose our life for the sake of the gospel.

Wow, it's so not easy to follow in God's ways

rather than the ways of humanity, right?

Because the world we live in is steeped in the ways of humanity.

I remember watching TV and being bombarded by this one commercial for a reality TV show

where one of the hosts just keeps almost yelling at the participants:

“What's the most important thing?! MONEY!!”

I just kept thinking: no, that's not the most important thing!

That's putting our mind on worldly things and not on God's things,

on worldly ways and not on God's way.

Thinking of ourselves first, thinking of profit first and only making money

is not putting our mind on God's ways.

I don't mean to say that we should all live with nothing,

but the gospel tells us that profit is *not* the most important thing.

Following Jesus means that we put God's ways above our ways,

that we put God's ways above the world's ways.

Following Jesus means that we care for others as much, if not more, than we care for ourselves.

That we love God above all things.

Jesus says the greatest commandment is that we love God and love our neighbor.

Loving God and loving our neighbor, as God defines love,

means working for what is best for our neighbor.

So, Jesus the Christ often does *not* mean what we think it means.

Following Jesus often does not mean what we think it means.

Following Jesus is difficult.

But that's where God comes in, right?!

Because we do not follow alone, we do not walk alone.

All of us gathered together as God's people. And God walking with us always.

We are God's people, working together in God's mission.

God holds us together in community with one another.

God strengthens us. God uplifts us.

God empowers us to work together in love and peace, in mercy and hope,

in forgiveness, joy and grace.

We do all of this together, not alone.

Because Jesus IS the Christ!!

That is definitely NOT inconceivable!

Amen!