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Our Saviour/St. Stephen  
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Sisters and Brothers in Christ, let us pray...May the words of my mouth and meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. AMEN.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, I don't know about you, but growing up I regularly watched *The Three Stooges*.

We remember *The Three Stooges* television program, don't we? With Larry, Mo, and Curly. And then there was also Shemp, who tagged in later.

Indeed, as a youngster, part of my Sunday routine, was to come home from church, and watch *The Three Stooges* on television, while I had my lunch.

I don't know what it was about that show, but their bumbling antics, the slapstick, was just very entertaining.

Even now, I will still every once in a while catch an episode of *The Three Stooges* on television.

For it is still entertaining.

PAUSE

Maybe that is why I find the Gospel of Mark so very entertaining at times.

Because the disciples themselves come across as bumbling and error prone.

For instance, there is the scene in Mark's Gospel where the disciples are all in a boat, and they have just experienced not one but two miraculous feeding events, where Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes.

And so there the disciples are in the boat, and the biblical text says, "The disciples had forgotten to bring any bread, and they had only one loaf with them in the boat."

DOPE. Yes, bumbling, error prone, the disciples are.

Or, maybe we remember the scene where Jesus' disciples have just been told by Jesus that he is going to be betrayed into human hands, and suffer death, that he will be killed, that he will be murdered.

And then, THEN the disciples in the very next scene are doing what?

They are arguing...arguing about who is the greatest among them.

DOPE. (Shake head.) Bumbling, error prone.

PAUSE

I could go on and on. But we get the picture. The disciples are their own group of stooges.

PAUSE

And so, we come to our Gospel text for today.

This text, which we know as the Confession of St. Peter.

Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?"

And the disciples respond, "John the Baptist, other says Elijah, and still others say one of the prophets."

But then Jesus asks, "But who do YOU say that I am?"

And Peter pipes up, Peter confesses, saying, "You, Jesus, are the Messiah."

You, Jesus, are the Messiah.

PAUSE

Now, yes, Jesus is the Messiah.

But Jesus is not like the Messiah the disciples had expected.

The disciples had expected a Messiah who would rise up against their Roman occupiers.

The disciples had expected a Messiah who would be a military leader, who would lead an army against the Roman occupying force.

This is the Messiah the disciples were expecting.

And this is why then Jesus says, “Don’t tell anyone about me. Not a peep. Not a word now, disciples. Don’t tell anyone about me.”

Why? Because the disciples have got it all wrong.

DOPE.

Yes, Jesus is the Messiah, but he is not the kind of Messiah they had expected.

And so, Jesus goes on to explain what kind of Messiah he is.

That he (Jesus) will suffer, be rejected, and killed, and three days later rise again.

Jesus is a Messiah who will DIE.

And this, this doesn’t calculate with the disciples understanding of the Messiah who as a military leader would be victorious over the Roman oppressors.

And so, Peter calls Jesus on it.

“Look, Jesus, this can’t happen to you.”

“If you are the Messiah, you will conquer our enemy.”

“So, it can’t be as you say.”

But, Jesus explains that his suffering, death, and resurrection is divinely ordained.

It must happen. It cannot be otherwise.

That is how the Greek text expresses it.

“The Son of Man MUST undergo these events.”

The Greek word here being “day” (spelled “delta-epsilon-iota”—D-E-I), conveying “absolute necessity,” “divinely ordained.”

It must happen.

And so, Peter, by rebuking Jesus, has positioned himself so that he is an obstacle to the very will of God.

Not a good place to be, mind you.

Talk about being stuck between a rock and a hard place.

Peter has put himself between Jesus and the will of God almighty.

Not a good place to be at all.

Which is why Jesus says to him, “Get behind me, Satan, for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

And if we didn’t know the word “satan” (*ho satanos*) means “adversary,” someone who is an obstacle.

PAUSE

No, it is not easy to find one’s self in the position of an obstacle to the will very of God.

No, it is not easy always to know what it is to set our mind on divine things and not on human things.

But the Scriptures do give us clues.

Jesus tells us to take up our cross and follow him.

That is what it means, so it would seem in this text, to set our mind on divine things, and not on human things.

Take up your cross and follow him.

In other places in the Gospels, Jesus also tells us things like, “Love your enemy. Turn the other cheek. And to give the shirt off our back as well if someone demands our coat.”

That is also good advice regarding setting our minds on divine things.

Furthermore, the apostle Paul tells us not to do anything from selfish ambition nor from a cheap desire to boast, but be humble toward one another, and always consider others as better than ourselves.

Always consider others as BETTER than ourselves.

Boy, those are tough words, especially in a world where terms like “entitlement,” and “privilege,” and “supremacy” are bounced around in our culture.

But here again is advice regarding setting our mind on divine things.

PAUSE

And, let's sit with those words for a moment.

"Consider others as better than ourselves."

Let's sit with those words.

For after all Jesus who dies on the cross for us embodied these words, did he not?

Jesus said, "I came into this world to serve, not to be served."

Jesus gave up his life for the sake of the world.

Did not Jesus consider others as better than himself?

Kind of strange question, when we understand Jesus to be the very Son of God.

But interestingly enough, the preferred title Jesus used of himself was NOT "Son of God," it was NOT "Lord," and it was NOT "Messiah."

No, Jesus preferred to refer to himself as "Son of Man;" that is the title most prevalent in the Gospels.

We see an example of that in this Gospel text today.

Jesus says, "Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the SON OF MAN will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

"Son of Man" is a title that doesn't express any sense of lordship over another.

Any person really is a "son of man," right? Or in the case of a woman, "the daughter of man."

It is really just another way of saying "human being."

Son of man equals human being.

And it is as if Jesus uses this term to suggest that he is no better than anyone else, and wants us to see ourselves as such.

But that in fact other people are better than ourselves.

This is what it means, at least in part, to set our mind on divine things.

PAUSE

A very early Christian hymn captures this notion very well—this notion that Jesus lowers himself, putting others above him.

The words of this early Christian hymn are in Paul’s letter to the Philippians.

Paul quotes the Christian hymn to the Philippians.

“Be of the same mind as was that in Jesus Christ,” says Paul.

In others words, think like Jesus.

And here then are the words of the hymn:

Think like Jesus...

Who, though he was in the form of God,

Did not regard equality with God

As something to be exploited,

But emptied himself,

Taking the form of a slave,

Being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,

He humbled himself

And became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

I don’t have any idea what the tune would have been like for this hymn, but these words are profound.

Jesus emptied himself of all privilege, entitlement, and supremacy, as the Son of God.

Jesus humbled himself and became human, like us.

And in truth Jesus saw others as better than himself such that he became obedient to death, even death on a cross.

PAUSE

Friends, much of what plagues this world and the human race is a result of us human beings acting like the three stooges.

Much of what plagues the world is a result of setting our mind on human things, and not on divine things.

Much of what plagues the world is a result of seeing ourselves as better than others.

Many-a-war in history is the result of humans thinking they themselves are better than others.

Many-a-famine is the result of humans thinking themselves privileged, whereby the abundance of a few is not shared with the need of the many.

Many-a-genocide is the result of some humans thinking they are of higher status.

My God, it is a wonder how frequently and to what dire consequences, humanity has put itself between in a rock and a hardplace.

How frequently we humans have positioned ourselves as an obstacle to God's will.

How frequently we humans have played the role of Satan, of Adversary, when it didn't have to be that way.

PAUSE

Whether we know it or not, this passage from Mark's Gospel today would have had monumental importance for changing much in the course of human history, if we humans had just committed its teaching to practice.

If only we would learn to value all people, even putting ourselves in the lower place, like Jesus did on the cross.

If only we would learn...

If only we would set our mind on divine things.

Thanks be to God. AMEN.