

When my oldest brother, Moses, came from Australia to visit dad before he passed away; mom kept asking Moses to talk to dad and see if he'd anything to say to the family. I suppose giving and receiving the last words from a dying man is one defining moment; those words would be taken seriously.

As we come to the end of our series, "Jesus has Questions For You," we have been learning about some important last words in the form of questions that Jesus has been telling the disciples, as they accompany Him on the way to Jerusalem - the place where He'd receive His death sentence and execution. These words are aimed to correct their distorted view of messiahship and challenge them to follow Him on the way to the cross.

As we observe Good Friday, let's focus on Jesus' question to Peter, James, and John in Mk. 9:12 (NIV), "Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected?" And let me share with you a couple of key lessons upon which we can prayerfully reflect and apply to our walk with Jesus.

Fulfilling God's will overrides any momentary hype that might derail mission advance.

Jesus' question to the three disciples is made on their way down from the mountain where the three ...

- witnessed the dazzling radiance of Jesus [i.e., a sneak preview of the glory and majesty of the resurrected Christ],
- saw the appearance of Moses and Elijah [who also had their encounters with God on the mountains, cf. Ex. 3; 1Ki. 19:8ff.],
- heard the voice of God,
- and covered by the cloud as symbol of God's presence and protection.

It's a mountain-top God-encounter moment - a mystical and magical revelation moment that is both numinous and awesome at the same time, reminiscent of various theophanies recorded in the OT! [^{Mk. 9:6} ***{Peter} did not know what to say, they were so frightened.***]

We all have mountaintop experiences or emotionally hyped moments when we feel so excited, happy and high, beaming with enthusiasm and optimism, e.g., passing your driving licence test, receiving an award, accepted by a university, graduation, going out for a first date, getting engaged or married, getting a hole-in-one in golf, having your first baby, and the list could go on and on.

For people of faith moments like first believe and encountering Jesus, baptism, starting a new ministry, extraordinary spiritual experiences, brings a heightened sense of God's presence and purpose.

[Type in the Chat ONE mountain top experience you can recall.]

I remember the opening Sunday of the Cornerstone Centre when we had over 900 people gathering to worship and celebrate the occasion – after being a mobile church for 17 yrs. – a God-moment indeed and some of you were there! And I am looking forward to worship with you there again, soon, Lord willing!

Now let's get back to this story of Jesus' transfiguration. This whole astounding scene appears to align with Peter's (and popular Jewish) mistaken expectation of a glorious and triumphant arrival of the powerful political leader and the appearance of the prophet Elijah whom the OT has foretold to be the forerunner of the coming messiah and the arrival of new messianic era.

Peter is so hyped that he doesn't want to leave and suggests building three individual tents for each! Peter wants to set up a base camp; and he is thinking, "Finally, the game is on!" He wants Jesus to put together his messianic team and set up His kingdom. (Cf. Scott Perkins)

It's instructive to read that Peter's enthusiasm is doused:

⁷Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. **Listen to him!**" ... ⁹As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders **not to tell anyone** what they had seen

until the Son of Man had risen from the dead ... ¹² Why then is it written that **the Son of Man must suffer** much and be rejected?

From these verses we see:

- God's instruction and affirmation of Jesus' words and works, thus confirming Jesus' correct understanding of messiahship (cf. Mk. 1:11);
- the assured future shapes present posture and practices [i.e., keep silent so not to fuel mistaken notion of messiahship and thus jeopardize God's world restoring plan; "until the Son of Man had **risen from the dead**" – Jesus' death and resurrection manifest His power over death and evil];
- Jesus' submission to what lies ahead as prophesized in Scriptures (cf. Ps. 22; Isa. 52:13-53:18) and being intentional in fulfilling His mission [i.e., suffering and shame **done to Him by others**, being treated with contempt].

Jesus' message to the disciples is that they must look beyond what is good here and now:

Don't let momentary enjoyment compromise future flourishing.

This has been a pretty disruptive and depressing year for many of us – lamenting loss of different kinds while socially isolated, emotionally stressed, financially worried, physically drained, and spiritually confused.

We are nostalgic about pre-Covid happy hours, mountain-tops moments and we yearn for immediate relief and a promising future.

It is heartening to know that Jesus didn't stay on the mountain top and jettison the mission entrusted to Him by the Father. Whatever our struggles, Jesus is able to empathize with us so we can receive mercy and find grace in our time of need. (Cf. Heb. 2, 4 – a brother and highpriest who can sympathize with us.)

See, like Peter and the rest of the disciples, we want to fit Jesus into our story; but Jesus is turning this narrative around, summoning us to see our place in His story.

As Asian theologian Vinoth Ramachandra says,

“God the Warrior became the Crucified God ... The power of the story of God's suffering is that while our suffering may appear utterly senseless, we can place our story of loss alongside God's story and see what meaning (if any) emerges. We may come to see how a terrible situation can be redeemed, and wait on God to see how he can bring forth something good out of tragedy ...

(*Sarah's Laughter: Doubt, Tears, and Christian Hope*, locations 1289, 1311, Kindle Edition.).

Out of our disappointment, tears, hurt, woundedness, and brokenness God is shaping us into something new, just as the suffering of Christ creates a new beginning for anyone who believes. God-in-Jesus has given us all that we need to equip ourselves for what He has for us tomorrow!

But it is precisely for our future that the Son of Man must suffer and that brings us to the second key lesson:

Self-giving love breaks the chains of oppression and enables human flourishing.

Mark doesn't tell us the contents of the conversation between Jesus, Moses, and Elijah; however, Luke recalls the following:

Lk. 9:30 Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. ³¹ They spoke about his ***departure***, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.

The word “departure” is the Greek word, ***exodus***, here used in combination with the appearance of Moses and Elijah – the former led the Israelites out of Egypt and the latter as one who would come to prepare the way for the arrival of the messiah (cf. Mk. 1:2-4; 9:12 [both Mark and Jesus

identify John as Elijah]; Ex. 23:20; Mal. 3:1 [4:5]; Is. 40:3 [new Exodus motif].).

In the story of Exodus God crushes the stubborn spirit and breaks the iron will of Pharaoh, thus magnifying the power of God to rescue His people from slavery and death, delivering them from their enemy and oppression, so they could begin a new journey toward a flourishing life in the Promise Land, with Him as their Father-Leader-Provider.

When we look through the lenses of the NT, Exodus is a pointer and a pattern/paradigm to the saving significance of the coming of Jesus.

Jesus says in Mk. 10:45, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

And Peter, who doesn’t fully grasp what Jesus is talking up till this point, later writes after the resurrection,

^{1Pe.1:18} For you know that **God paid a ransom to save you** ... it was not paid with mere gold or silver ... ¹⁹ It was **the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb** ... ²⁰ God chose him as your **ransom** long before the world began, but now in these last days he has been **revealed for your sake.**

We haven’t done nor can we ever do anything by our human efforts to set ourselves free from anything or

anybody that has enslaved us. [Like the beginning steps of the AA recovery program, we must admit we are powerless ... and that our lives have become unmanageable; believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.]

That’s the whole idea of ransom/redemption, with the Exodus/Passover as the OT background – **God invested His very own self and initiated to pay the price for our freedom** (Cf. Ps. 77:15; 78:52-54; Hos. 7:13-14), **to flourish and thrive.**

- Some of us might be stuck in a vicious cycle of guilt and shame because of past sin or moral failure or continuous addiction to a drug of choice;
- some might be ensnared by unresolved social conflict or injustice;
- some are enslaved by people expectations or perfectionist ideals;
- some are trapped by mental, physical, and emotion health issues;
- and some are attacked or harassed by forces of darkness, and the list goes on.

We are indeed in what John Henry Newman called a ‘vast primordial catastrophe’ (Cf. Fleming Rutledge, *The Crucifixion*, p. 185.) and that only a stronger power from

outside ourselves can break the chains of oppression and evil.

[Response Moment: *Do you want your chains be broken?*]

Here is the good news of the cross:

In contrast to the contemporary spirit of Cancel Culture which withdraws support and shames people who have done or said something considered objectionable or offensive to one's moral values or convictions, **God didn't cancel us and leave us alone in our own created hell of self-destruction, social and moral chaos – He delivers all of creation from the grip of sin, evil, and death.**

Col. 1:13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Because in God's eyes we are worthy of His best, God-in-Jesus **unleashes the power of self-giving love** as the Rescuer and He takes out His check-book, pays on our behalf, and secures our freedom and future.

Jesus gives His life in place of sinners as a ransom - for our best interests:

- devoted to seeing us flourish,
- fighting for us against all enemies,

- determined to eliminate everything destructive from our life,
- attentive to every detail of who we are, never thinking of himself at all but only for us! (cf. Fleming Rutledge)

The all embracing and eternal love of God for the world is cramped into and bled out of the broken body of the Messiah who was nailed on the cross.

God gives us Himself in Jesus so we can have everything to live with as well as everything to live for, in all eternity!

[Response Moment: *Let's raise a hallelujah! Yes?*]

On the night of his arrest, Jesus sat to eat with his disciples at what we now refer to as "The Last Supper". There, he taught his closest friends about the bread and the wine that represented his body and blood. We're going to share in the Lord's Supper together now as Jesus taught us to do. Follow me to join Libby at the table.