

Mark 8:31-38
March 8, 2009

South Plains

Savoring the Things of God

My sermon title comes from the King James Version of the reading for today: "He [Jesus] rebuked Peter, saying, "Get thee behind me Satan: for thou savorest not the things that be of God." It's not a very literal translation of Jesus' words, but "to savor the things of God" captures the essence of real discipleship. Jesus' rebuke takes dead aim at our very human tendency to indulge in all the flavors of Christianity that please us, but to say "No thanks" to what pleases God. One of the purposes of the season of Lent is to develop a taste for the things of God. Unfortunately, this means giving up some bad habits and some wrong ideas.

That was the problem of Simon Peter. He thought he was doing all the right things as a disciple. He had just experienced one of the shining moments of brilliance we all cherish. The teacher asked a question, and Peter had the right answer. They were well into their apprenticeship when the twelve got a pop quiz. "Who do you say that I am?" asked Jesus. They had reviewed some of the wrong answers when Peter, from the unimagined depths of his soul, blurted out, "You are the Christ."

Bingo! Jews had been looking for the Christ or the Messiah for centuries before Jesus came along. The

Christ was the king anointed by God. When the last of the legitimate rulers of Israel died and the nation was led by puppet monarchs controlled by Rome, people clung to belief in the coming Christ. It was the anchor of hope for an oppressed people. One day, one day, the Lord would once again anoint a real king who would lead his people in triumph.

Jesus accepted that title, but not the role. He radically altered the expectations for the Christ. He would not be the Christ anticipated by Peter and his contemporaries. And, for this reason, Jesus orders his disciples several times not to tell anyone about his true identity. He needed to complete their training, their education in the things of God. Peter is like a student in a culinary school who has just been given a steaming dish garnished with tasty mushrooms. He wants to put gourmet mushrooms in everything he cooks. But, he's told he must not use mushrooms in his own dishes until he can tell the difference between what's poisonous and what is good.

Therefore, Jesus begins again to teach. He does not use the powerful title "Christ," even though that is the word around which his destiny grows. Instead he says,

The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. (8:31)