

DATE: MARCH 1, 2015
SCRIPTURES: GENESIS 17:1-7; MARK 8:27-38
TITLE: WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?

RECENTLY I SAW A CARTOON OF A MAN
CLIMBING A HILL UP TO WHERE
A LONG BEARDED, SHAGGY HAired MAN SAT.
A SIGN WITH THE WORD "GURU" ON IT
STOOD BEHIND THE SHAGGY HAired MAN.
THE HIKER'S COMPANION, PERHAPS HIS WIFE,
STOOD AT THE BOTTOM OF THE HILL.
SHE WAS CALLING OUT TO HIM,
"DON'T TRUST HIM, DAVID;
HE'S AN AUTHORITY FIGURE."
THIS CARTOON SPEAKS VOLUMES
ABOUT PEOPLE'S MISTRUST OF AUTHORITY,
NOT JUST HERE IN THE UNITED STATES
BUT AROUND THE WORLD.
SANDRA BARINGER, THE AUTHOR OF THE BOOK,
THE METANARRATIVE OF SUSPICION, SAYS
"MISTRUST OF AUTHORITY HAS ALWAYS EXISTED. . . .
BUT IT SEEMS TO HAVE BLOSSOMED
IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY
(AND BECOME UBIQUITOUS , PERVASIVE,
IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY)."

HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?

HOW DID WE GO

FROM SUPPORT OF AND TRUST IN OUR GOVERNMENT
IN WORLD WAR II
TO WHERE WE ARE TODAY?

BARINGER SUGGESTS

THERE WERE MANY STOPPING POINTS ALONG THE WAY ~
THE MCCARTHY ERA;
CONCERNS ABOUT THE MOTIVATION OF THE VIET NAM WAR
COMPOUNDED BY THE PENTAGON PAPERS;
THE ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT KENNEDY AND THE CONSPIRACY
THEORY AROUND IT;
THE POLITICS SURROUNDING THE EQUAL RIGHTS MOVEMENT;
THE WATERGATE SCANDAL;
THE MOTIVATION BEHIND DESERT STORM;
THE SCANDAL IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE CHURCH'S
ATTEMPT TO COVER IT UP;
THE WIKI LEAKS;
THE ERIC SNOWDEN AFFAIR;
THE POWER OF THE INTERNET AND PEOPLE'S FEAR OF ITS
MISUSE.

BARINGER SUGGESTS THIS WIDESPREAD DISTRUST
OF CHURCH AND STATE RESULTS FROM

“ . . . (OUR) DEEP DOUBTS ABOUT,
WHO IS REALLY IN CHARGE
OF THIS HOPELESSLY COMPLEX WORLD “

IF WE THINK WE CANNOT TRUST
ORGANIZED RELIGION OR GOVERNMENT,
WHOM CAN WE TRUST?
OR BETTER YET, WHOM WILL WE TRUST?
SHOULD WE TRUST PEOPLE,
WHO SAY THAT THEY HAVE THE ANSWERS
TO OUR HOPELESSLY COMPLEX WORLD?
WHO SAY THEY, AND THEY ONLY, HAVE A DIRECT LINE TO TRUTH?
THESE PEOPLE CAN MAKE SOME VERY PERSUASIVE ARGUMENTS.
AND WHAT THEY SAY CAN BE VERY TEMPTING,
FOR MANY OF US LONG FOR A SIMPLER TIME,
A TIME OF MORE CERTAINTY AND LESS CHAOS.
YET, PEOPLE WITH ALL THE ANSWERS
OFTEN OVERSIMPLIFY THE PROBLEMS.
OFTEN, THEY PROVIDE SIMPLISTIC ANSWERS,
ANSWERS THAT PROMOTE THEIR AGENDA
WITH LITTLE OR NO CONCERN FOR OTHERS.
OR SHOULD WE TRUST ONLY OURSELVES?
PUT OURSELVES AT THE CENTER OF OUR WORLD?
MAKE OURSELVES THE SOLE ARBITER OF OUR LIVES?
THIS “SOLUTION” IS ALSO RIFE WITH PROBLEMS,
FOR AS THE NATIVE AMERICAN PROVERB SAYS,
WITHIN EACH OF US ARE TWO WOLVES,
ONE HAS THE CAPACITY FOR GOOD,
THE OTHER EVIL.
THE REALITY OF THE HUMAN CONDITION
IS WE SUCCUMB TO TEMPTATION,
MOST ESPECIALLY THE TEMPTATION
TO PUT OUR WANTS AND NEEDS
ABOVE THE WANTS AND NEEDS OF OTHERS.
THIS TEMPTATION IS EVER BEFORE US.

IF WE ARE SUSPICIOUS
OF ORGANIZED RELIGION AND GOVERNMENT
AND SHOULD BE SUSPICIOUS OF OUR OWN MOTIVATIONS,
WHOM CAN WE TRUST?
TO WHOM OR WHAT IF ANYTHING, WILL WE ENTRUST OUR LIVES?
TO WHOM OR WHAT, IF ANYTHING,
WILL WE CEDE AUTHORITY OVER OUR LIVES?

ULTIMATELY, THE ISSUE OF AUTHORITY
IS BEHIND JESUS' QUESTION TO THE DISCIPLES.

HE ASKS,

“WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?”

RASH PETER IS THE ONLY ONE OF THE TWELVE MEN
BOLD ENOUGH TO ANSWER JESUS' QUESTION.

SURPRISINGLY, HIS RESPONSE,

“YOU ARE THE MESSIAH,
GOD'S ANOINTED.”

IS RIGHT ON THE MONEY.

WE'RE SURPRISED,

BECAUSE WE KNOW PETER'S STORY.

WE KNOW HE GETS IT WRONG TIME AFTER TIME.

HE WANTS TO BUILD THREE BOOTHS AT JESUS' TRANSFIGURATION.

HE SINKS WHEN HE TRIES TO WALK ON WATER.

HE DENIES JESUS THREE TIMES

ON THE NIGHT OF JESUS' ARREST.

NONETHELESS, AT THIS MOST CRITICAL JUNCTURE

IN THE DISCIPLES' LIVES,

PETER GETS IT RIGHT.

SADLY, PETER'S GLORY DOES NOT LAST LONG.

JESUS' UNDERSTANDING OF MESSIAH

IS VASTLY DIFFERENT FROM PETER'S.

PETER THINKS *MESSIAH* MEANS KINGSHIP, MIGHT, VICTORY.

JESUS KNOWS BETTER.

AS MESSIAH, JESUS WILL TAKE UP HIS PEOPLES' CAUSE.

HE WILL STAND IN SOLIDARITY WITH THEM

AND ADVOCATE FOR THEM,

AND RESIST THE TERRIBLE INJUSTICES AND INDIGNITIES

THEY ENDURE ON A DAILY BASIS.

JESUS KNOWS FULL WELL HIS ACTIONS WILL DISCOMFORT

THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND THE ROMAN GOVERNMENT

AND IF HE PERSISTS,

HE WILL BE REJECTED, ARRESTED, AND KILLED.

TO PREPARE HIS MEN FOR WHAT LIES AHEAD,

HE BEGINS TO TELL THEM

WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS FOR HIM.

NO SOONER ARE THE WORDS OUT OF HIS MOUTH,

THAN PETER GRABS HOLD OF HIM,

LEADS HIM OFF A SHORT DISTANCE,

AND BEGINS TO REBUKE HIM.

JESUS' RESPONSE IS SWIFT AND FIRM.

FORCEFULLY, HE TELLS PETER,

“GET THEE BEHIND ME, SATAN!”

AT THAT MOMENT,

JESUS SEES PETER TEMPTING AND TESTING HIM

AS SATAN DID IN THE WILDERNESS.

THEN, JESUS TELLS THEM ONE AND ALL,

“IF ANY WANT TO BECOME MY FOLLOWERS,
LET THEM DENY THEMSELVES,
TAKE UP THEIR CROSS,
AND FOLLOW ME.”

I THINK IT’S INTERESTING

THAT JESUS PUTS HIS QUESTION TO THE DISCIPLES
AS THEY ARE ON THEIR WAY TO CAESAREA PHILIPPI.
THE WORSHIP OF THE ROMAN GOD, PAN, LONG PREVAILED THERE.
LATER, PHILIP THE TETRARCH, ONE OF KING HEROD’S SON,
RENAMED IT IN HONOR OF TIBERIUS CAESAR.
IT WAS A CITY THAT EXEMPLIFIED THE WORLDLY VALUES
OF POWER, WEALTH, STATUS;

A CITY WHOSE VALUES STOOD IN STARK CONTRAST
TO JESUS’ VALUES.

SINCE THEY ARE ON THEIR WAY TO CAESAREA PHILIPPI,
JESUS’ QUESTION OF HIS IDENTITY

HAS ANOTHER QUESTION EMBEDDED IN IT:

“WHERE ARE YOU GOING?”

ARE YOU GOING AFTER THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD,
OR ARE YOU SEEKING THOSE THINGS
EXEMPLIFIED BY THE CROSS?

THIS READING PUTS TWO VERY IMPORTANT QUESTIONS TO US.

WILL WE FOLLOW THE PATH THAT LEADS TO CAESAREA PHILIPPI?

THE PATH THAT LEADS TO THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD?

THE PATH THAT LEADS

TO POWER, WEALTH, STATUS, GLORY?

OR WILL WE FOLLOW THE PATH JESUS BLAZED?

THE PATH THAT LEADS TO SERVICE TO OTHERS?

THE PATH THAT LEADS TO THE CROSS?

LET ME BE VERY CLEAR ABOUT THIS, DEAR FRIENDS,

CHOOSING TO FOLLOW JESUS ALWAYS ENTAILS

TAKING UP OUR CROSS,

FOR IT MEANS NO LONGER MAKING OURSELVES

THE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE,

THE CENTER OF OUR CONCERN.

IT MEANS NAILING

OUR SELF-INTEREST,

OUR SELFISH DESIRES,

OUR LACK OF CONCERN FOR OTHERS

TO THE CROSS.

IT MEANS DYING TO SELF SO OTHERS MIGHT FLOURISH.

HOW WE ANSWER THIS FIRST QUESTION,

DETERMINES HOW WE WILL ANSWER THE SECOND,

“TO WHOM OR WHAT WILL WE

GIVE AUTHORITY OVER OUR LIVES?”

THE WILLINGNESS TO DIE TO SELF

IS THE FERTILE SOIL FROM WHICH

THE WILLINGNESS TO TAKE UP OUR CROSS SPRINGS.

LIKE PETER,

THE TEMPTATION IS EVER BEFORE US TO DEFINE *MESSIAH*
BY OUR OWN PRECONCEIVED IDEAS
OR OUR OFT UNACKNOWLEDGED DESIRES.

THE TEMPTATION IS TO TRY TO AVOID GOOD FRIDAY;
TO GO DIRECTLY FROM PALM SUNDAY TO EASTER.

YET, JESUS DOES NOT SHRINK FROM THE CROSS
AND NEITHER CAN WE

IF WE WANT TO EXPERIENCE THE JOY OF EASTER.

ONLY BY TAKING UP OUR CROSS,

ONLY BY COMMITTING OUR LIVES TO SACRIFICIAL LOVE,
ONLY COMMITTING OUR LIVES TO ACTS OF
LOVE, COMPASSION, JUSTICE, PEACE
WILL WE RISE TO NEW LIFE.

ON EASTER SUNDAY, WHEN WE PROCLAIM,

“HE IS RISEN!”

“HE IS RISEN, INDEED!”

WE WILL KNOW IT IS TRUE,

FOR IT HAS HAPPENED IN OUR OWN LIVES.

TO WHOM SHOULD WE ENTRUST OUR LIVES?

TO THE ONE WHO TOOK UP HIS CROSS

THAT ALL MIGHT SEE THE GLORY OF GOD. AMEN.