

Sometimes extreme situations call for extreme measures. Once again Jesus is teaching his disciples. He is not speaking before a crowd this time, teaching the multitudes, just the twelve. In this passage, Jesus teaches them what New Testament scholars refer to as the first of the passion predictions in Matthew's Gospel. There will be three more. Jesus teaches the twelve that he must go to Jerusalem, and that he must suffer and be killed. This shocking revelation raises a question for us, as it apparently did for Peter. Why? Why must he die?

Poor Peter. This is one situation where we can probably identify with him the most. The disciples had no clear idea of what was really going to happen. Throughout the Gospels, all four of them, the disciples are depicted over and over again as not getting it. Their expectations of who Jesus is and what he was about, what his mission was had almost nothing to do with the reality. They, like most Jews of the time, were expecting either a different kind of Messiah, or a Messiah that behaved differently than Jesus did, with a much different end than the one Jesus was headed for. And who could blame them? This is what they had been taught all their lives about the coming Messiah. They were told that he was going to establish a new kingdom on the earth. And Jesus did teach them about his kingdom. He told them parables to illustrate for them what his kingdom would be like. Still, their expectations did not align with the reality. Jesus continually had to correct the apostles. And continually they failed to understand.

Of all the times Peter seems to represent the twelve, or speak on their behalf, this episode is the most extreme. Jesus not only snaps at him, but calls him Satan. And a second question arises: why must Jesus react to Peter this way?

The disciples certainly had very different expectations of Jesus as their Messiah. Again, it's difficult to blame them for that. But just as certainly, they loved Jesus. They left their homes, businesses and families to follow him. They were his *disciples*. They had given their lives over to him. They may not have truly realized that he was the Second Person of the Trinity, that he was God incarnate, but they knew there was something very special about him. They listened to his teachings. No one ever spoke like that before. And they witnessed his miracles. They fully expected him to be the Messiah they were hoping for: The One who would deliver them from oppression and tyranny and establish a new kingdom, a kingdom of peace and prosperity. Even so, apart from all that, they knew Jesus the man, and they loved him.

For Peter and the rest to hear Jesus say that he must die was both shocking and incomprehensible. The Messiah could never be defeated. A defeated, dead Messiah was no Messiah at all. It only seems natural, and what any of us would have done if we had been there, for Peter to tell Jesus "God forbid it Lord! This must never happen to you!"

But of course we who live in the Age of the Church, those of us who are baptized into the Risen Christ know that it did happen. Jesus did

suffer and die. He died for us, to atone for the sins of the world. He sacrificed Himself to redeem us. And we are redeemed. Our sins are forgiven because of what Jesus did. But why did He have to *die* for that to happen? Was there no other way?

Imagine how Peter must have felt at the time. Imagine what the other disciples must have felt as they were looking on, Jesus so harshly and firmly rebuked Peter. Surely all of them, and especially Peter, were doubly shocked now. Not only was their beloved Lord's prediction shocking and incomprehensible, his treatment of Peter was even more so. To them, it was just the other day when Jesus blessed Peter in front of them all for rightly declaring that He was the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, when Jesus told them all he was going to build his church upon the foundation of Peter the Rock, and when Jesus gave Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven. And now here is Jesus going to the other extreme, calling Peter Satan and a stumbling block! You can imagine the disciples, in utter bewilderment and confusion thinking, or saying, "Lord! How could you say something like *that*? How can this be? Why must you die?"

Apparently there were times when Jesus had to take extreme measures. He had to take extreme measures because of what was at stake. Peter did rightly identify Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. But even so, he didn't know what being the Messiah, the Son of the Living God entailed. Because there was so much at stake, Jesus had to take the

extreme measure of characterizing the belief that he did not have to die as demonic, even satanic. Jesus had to shock his disciples into the realization that from that point on, from there to Jerusalem and beyond to Calvary and for the rest of their lives, they were to follow, believe in and obey a crucified Messiah. And the reason that Jesus must be crucified was because his kingdom was far, far grander than the disciples had imagined. Jesus' kingdom extends far beyond Jerusalem, beyond Israel, beyond the Mediterranean, beyond the farthest boundaries the disciples knew of. Jesus' kingdom extends far beyond the time of the lifespan of the disciples and their contemporaries. Jesus' kingdom extends to all peoples and all places at all times. His is a kingdom that transcends earthly boundaries. Jesus' kingdom means the restoration of what was lost in the Fall of Adam. Jesus' kingdom means the reconciliation of God and humanity. Yet why must Jesus die in order for his kingdom to be established?

To restore what was lost in the Fall of Adam, to reconcile humanity with God, the collective transgressions of all humanity had to be adjudicated. And there was no other way to deal with sin apart from the death of the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. Without the death of the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, all of humanity, all peoples from all times and places, all languages and nationalities would be forever lost, a prospect that would please no one but Satan himself.

Because all sin is ultimately against God, the collective sins of humanity are infinitely great. The sins of the world are so extreme, so

deep because they offend an infinitely good and great God. The justice of God demands punishment for sin. But because the debt humanity owes to God because of sin is infinite, it is greater than humanity is able to bear.

And so, God in His mercy became incarnate in order to do what only someone who is both infinite and human could do. If there were any other way, certainly the Lord would have provided it. Even Jesus had a moment of wondering if there might be another way. In the Garden of Gethsemane, he asked the Father if he might be willing to let this pass from him. But he denied himself and obeyed His Father's will. There was no other way. To save us from our sins, he must die.

Jesus knew in advance what awaited him. He told his disciples beforehand about how he was to suffer and die. Jesus could not let the disciples indulge the idea that He would achieve his goal of bringing the kingdom of heaven to earth by ordinary, human means even if He had to go to an extreme by calling Peter "Satan".

And it seems Jesus' vision extended even farther into the future. Even today, some would have us believe that Jesus didn't have to die on the cross, that He didn't need to sacrifice Himself for the sins of the world because there really isn't any such thing as sin like the Bible tells us. If anyone tries to tell you that, put it behind you right away. It's a stumbling block. It's a temptation. That's a humanistic philosophy. It's not Christian. There is no Christianity without a cross, no forgiveness of sins and no eternal life without the death of the Messiah.

Let's all think as God thinks, and not as some humans do. Amen.