

“Christ Will See You Through”

Mark 8:27-38

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I am in a bit of a “pickle” this morning with our sermon and sermon topic. I have at least three themes going on at the same time and that’s probably two to many. I hope and pray it is not as confusing to you as it has been to me.

The sermon title, “Christ Will See You Through”, is the title of a booklet that my late friend and mentor Dr. Richard Cromie wrote about twenty years ago and then revised in 2012. I have multiple copies of it around the office and our Lay Callers sometimes use them in hospital and other visits. It is a helpful booklet filled with quotes, prayers, scriptures that hopefully does what the title suggests, assures you that “Christ will see you through.” Regardless of the crisis, fear or predicament you find yourself in that Christ will see you through. Do you believe that? I hope so.

I also intend this sermon to say something about the 14th Anniversary of the 9-11 airplane attack in 2001 in New York City, Washington D.C. and Western Pennsylvania. Most of us recall that day and date vividly. We remember where we were at 8:46 a.m. when the first plane hit the first of the two Twin Towers standing in Lower Manhattan. For many that is the defining national disaster of our generation. Some have suggested that it stands alongside of the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 as the worst two days of national calamity in the history of our nation. Some might want to run other events up the flagpole as worst days but I think you get my point.

The Tuesday morning of 9-11 changed the lives of all of us. It brought fear for the first time or brought back fears that we had suppressed about war and attack from forces outside our country and beyond our control. It immediately changed how we looked at security at airports and security in general. But for all of our upgrades of security, the billions of dollars we spend on the Office of Homeland Security do you and I feel more secure now than before 9-11? I think the verdict is still out on that one.

I also have the theme of the scripture lesson from Mark 8. So, how do we get from Mark 8 and the story of Jesus and his disciples in the small villages of Caesarea Philippi to our title “Christ Will See You Through?”

If you read the verses leading up to our scripture in Mark you could say the disciples were in the midst of a crisis. They had been following Jesus around for almost a year now and they still didn’t understand what he was up to. I am sure they enjoyed his company and they delighted in being with this healer, this teller of stories and attracter of people. Wouldn’t you? Isn’t it fun to be with the “it” person or the person who is at the center of attention. That was Jesus. However, Jesus was up to something more than just being popular, more than healing for mere healing sake. So, on this journey through the mountains around Caesarea Philippi he asked them a direct question: “Who do people say that I am?” They gave the obvious answers: Elijah, John the

Baptist come back from the dead, one of the prophets of old, etc.” But then he got very personal and asked, “But who do you say that I am?” How do you answer that question?

Dr. Cromie’s story about this title how it came about involves the day he was contemplating dropping out of college because of lack of funds. His family was very blue collar and money was tight and he had been working odd jobs but the tuition was overdue. Most people measure burdens by how they affect you the individual who has to carry it. Back when he was 20 years old dropping out of college was a severe worry to him. People do struggle under large and small burdens for some it is the weight literally of the world for others it’s just getting through the evening traffic jam. He writes, “I can weep for the hungry, the orphaned, the lonely, the ill and the dying. But when I have trouble, the worries of my own ‘wee world’ is what perplexes me most.”

When he told his situation to his parents they said, “Don’t worry Richie, we will see you through.” They along with a secret “angel” did see him through to the end of his BA degree and he went on to seminary and a PhD. from the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. Reflecting back over his lifetime that wonderful promise had meant the world to him.

So, he now gives all of us a reassuring upgrade on that promise by saying, “Christ will see you through.” No matter what comes your way you can depend on Jesus.

It’s not too big of a jump from Dr. Cromie’s problem with tuition when he was 20 back in 1956 to our issue of a different crisis in 2001 forty-five years later. Each one of us in the passage of a whole lifetime, has some great burden to bear, some great chasm to cross, some dark and awful moments to get through, some years are long and lean and lingering ... each of us must dodge around those dire and sudden twists and turnings of the road which edge us off the beaten path to send us hurtling off over the berm into the rugged terrain beneath the grand highway. Soon or late each of us is visited by some huge and horrid disappointment which shows us up for the weak and mortal transitory creatures which we really are, but prefer not to talk about, pretending that it all falls in on other people.

The Bible says, “Yet is their strength labor and sorrow, for it is soon cut off and we fly away.” (Ps. 90:10). I am not trying to depress us this morning friends, but to remind you soon or late to each of us comes the events that we never dreamed would dare to darken the hallowed doorways of our youthful dreams and aged hopes. Every one of us before our days are done has some kind of infirmity, some worry, some trouble, some burden, too great to bear alone.

Maybe it’s a worry for another—a child, a husband, a wife, a parent or a friend. Maybe it’s a decision in the family circle as to what must happen next. Maybe it came as a horrid accident, some unexpected reversal in the vocational realm, some business failure, maybe some plane plowing into a skyscraper killing, injuring and displacing thousands of people we know and love.

And for those days and decades, for days like these, when we are remembering the anniversary of a tragedy I sometimes think that these words of our sermon title are the only thing you really need to know. That you are not alone. That Christ will see you through. That wherever life now has you or where life may take you, that there is someone who knows the way, who has the

power to help you to overcome it, and who has the light to shine within the darkness. My point this morning is this ... Christ will see you through.

When the first tower was hit at the World Trade Center the young woman on the 101st floor of Tower 2 knew what she had to do. Start walking down the staircase. Her supervisor told her to stay that the other tower had had some kind of explosion but not Tower 2 and they would be okay. But she didn't listen. Nor did she head for the elevators that were still working. She started walking down the stairs, all 101 floors. She prayed as she walked, she helped a few others who also were making the exit with her. She stepped out into the plaza just as the second plane hit her building. She ran as fast as she could to get as far away from the towers as possible. She would say later something to the effect, "God's watchful eye had been upon me that day," or as I would like to say it "that Christ will see us through." Why did she start walking and many others stay? You will drive yourself crazy trying to answer that question. It wasn't God telling her to leave nor was it a guardian angel. We all react to situations as intuition or something tells us. God does pick us up wherever we are and through life or death he will see you and your loved ones through to the end.

Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" And they stood around and just stared at each other, at the sky ... hopefully someone would speak up. And someone did. It was Peter. Peter the leader of the group, Peter the one who was filled with confidence until the ground moved around him and then he was one of the first to run for cover. Peter the one who said he would never turn away or deny Jesus and then found himself less than 8 hours later doing just that. But on this day Peter had the perfect answer. "You are the Messiah." Jesus said, "Don't tell anyone."

I wonder why Jesus said that? Why Jesus told them not to tell anyone? Jesus then goes on immediately to tell them that he must suffer and be rejected by the authorities and be killed and after three days rise again. Peter, the one who had declared that "Jesus was the Messiah" didn't want to hear about the outcome. He didn't want to know about suffering and rejection and death. I'm not sure he even heard the part about rising again.

Maybe that is why Jesus said to them, "Don't tell anyone." He thought maybe Peter and the others would get the Messiah part wrong. They thought of a Messiah as a conquering general like David. He would come riding a white horse, not a donkey, at the head of the troops leading the army of God into battle. No, Peter didn't want to hear about suffering. Peter and the others needed to know that regardless of what happened to them their friend Jesus would, "see them through."

We try to trick ourselves into believing that if we play by the rules, if we do our part right, then life will be fair and true to us. And that is where nature and our humanity lets us down. For life is not meant to be fair. Our life tells a story and it twists this way and that. A story for which we are not really the authors and one day, soon or late, comes to a close. Some of us say, "Wait? It can't be over I have too many things left to do."

I was riding with my friend Steve to a baseball game in Arlington, TX. He was a great baseball fan especially of the Yankees. He loved the Yankees and the Celtics and the UCLA Bruins and

the Oklahoma Sooners. Steve loved winners he thought everyone should embrace winners because they taught us the most about life. He and his wife always hosted the biggest party announcing the opening of the football season on Friday night before the first game. We were riding to TX and we were stopping off at the Federal Courthouse in Dallas for a filing he had to make, Steve was a lawyer and that is how he justified going with me to this baseball game besides the fact that the Texans were playing the Yankees. He thought a large corporation was taking advantage of his client in this court case and as he was reading through the filing he turned to me and said, "Glenn, this just isn't fair what this company is doing to this lady. Life is supposed to be fair to everyone." I almost stopped the car in the middle of I-20. I looked at him and said, "Where did you learn that life was supposed to be fair? God never promised us fair. If God had meant life to be fair then Jesus would never have died on a cross." Life gives us what comes our way and we attempt to make the best of it. We make the best of it knowing, "Christ will see us through whatever comes our way."

Ten months later my friend Steve was diagnosed with brain cancer and lived two more years, dead at 43. We talked about that conversation several times during the ensuing months. He would say, "Remember that day when I said life was suppose to be fair?" and of course we both caught the irony. He finally said, "I'm glad that life isn't fair ... I am also glad that Christ is there for me and my family." For you see we all have to come to the conclusion early or late that "Christ will see us through."

Paul writes, "Now you know in part, then you shall know in full." (I Cor. 13) And Jesus reassures his disciples, "I will not leave you comfortless. I will come to you. (John 14:18ff) I will see you through it. Come on now friends, everything is going to be okay. Just trust me."

God saw him through and out the other side; and because of that Christ will see you through and me and every other son and daughter of the Lord. "Christ will see you through."