



# Mt. Lebanon Evangelical Presbyterian Church

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March 16, 2023

“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

– Mark 8:34

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

For those of you who weren't able to worship with us on Sunday, Tom Pratt announced that we are glad to be able to grant Pastor Steve a sabbatical leave this summer. He will be away from May 15 to August 15, getting some much-deserved rest, time with family, time for writing, and time with the Lord. Our MLEPC sabbatical policy grants full-time pastors a sabbatical every seven years, and this will be Steve's first in almost fourteen years. Please be praying for him as he prepares to go and for us as we prepare to share all the many hats he wears in our church!

This week, we hit a major pivot point in the gospel of Mark. Jesus has asked the disciples who they think He is, and Peter declares, “You are the Messiah” (Mark 8:29). For the rest of Mark, the secret is out. And from here on, Jesus will constantly challenge people's assumptions about what the Messiah is here to do.

On Sunday, we are going to cover the end of Mark 8 and the beginning of Mark 9, and the two sections couldn't have greater contrast. They capture one of the highest highs and lowest lows. Chapter 9 shows what is called the Transfiguration of Jesus. Peter, James, and John get to experience the full glory of the Lord much like Moses saw the Lord in all His glory on Mt. Sinai. Jesus joins Moses and Elijah dressed in dazzling white and covered in a cloud. But just before that incredible moment and just after it, Jesus tells the disciples something almost equally mind-blowing: He will be killed and after three days will rise again (in both 8:31 and 9:31).

If you had been waiting for the Messiah for hundreds and thousands of years, wouldn't you want the Messiah of the Mountaintop, not the Messiah of the Cross? Peter immediately rejected Jesus' news that he would be killed. Jesus in turn rebuked him, telling him, “Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns” (8:33). He then told everyone, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (8:34).

So often our “human concerns” involve a desire for comfort, safety, ease, money, happiness, and any symbol of success we can imagine. Even Christians can promote a problem-free, happily-ever-after kind of life. Jesus wants us to understand that all our human concerns are temporary and fleeting. His Kingdom comes with struggles on earth but victory for eternity. We have to be willing to surrender, to sacrifice everything we have, to lay our lives down for Him. “For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it” (8:35). The price paid is the price of Christ's own life for ours, so that one day we can join Him in His glorious coming.

As you prepare your hearts for worship this week, ask the Lord to show you where you have placed human concerns over the Kingdom of God? Where have you let the pursuit of success or comfort cloud your vision of the glory of God? Spend time reflecting on the lines we will sing on Sunday: “Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small. Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.”

Blessings,  
Pastor Carolyn