

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Caesarea Philippi was at the foot of Mt. Hermon, and the villages of Caesarea Philippi were an unexpected spot for Jesus and his disciples to be found as it was primarily a Gentile area, a city famous for its sanctuary to Pan, half man and half goat, who was worshipped in a grotto at the foot of Mt. Hermon. It's here in the outer reaches of false-god worship, paganism, even hostility to Judaism, that Jesus is first proclaimed Messiah.

False worship continues to exist today, with untold false gods, created gods, that surround our lives, gods we sometimes maintain, centered in the concentration on self and our desires for pleasure, power and profit.

As they travel, Jesus asks his disciples: "Who do people say that I am?" It's a good question and perhaps his disciples will see the contrast between him and the false-gods worshipped in that region. It's a good question for us too, perhaps modern disciples will see and understand how invested people become in the world's ways of doing, thinking, valuing.

The disciples answer with John the Baptist, Elisha, one of the prophets, expectations of the Messiah to come. Then comes another question from Jesus: "But who do you say that I am?" "You are the Messiah," Peter answers. Messiah, Christ, *Xristos* in Greek, all mean the "Anointed One." Do not tell anyone Jesus orders them. His time, that of the crucifixion and resurrection, as set by the Father has not yet come.

Jesus then begins to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. Now you and I are familiar with this teaching, but let the meaning of what Jesus is saying, sink into you, because Jesus now as then, is reaching into the condition of life in this world, tragic and lost. So he's not about to do the popular thing, please the crowd or the world with ear candy, he's not going to adopt the ways of the world as attractive as they might seem. Jesus is the only way, the truth, the life, without who he is, and without what he has been sent for, true life cannot be restored in this world. What Jesus teaches runs contrary to the expectations and actions of the world, the world then, the world now.

Peter takes Jesus to the side and begins to rebuke him, a foreshadowing if you will, of how we often respond to our Lord. We see Jesus in a certain light, a certain way, and figure we can tell him what should be, what should be done. Kind of like having your own genie. And Jesus rebukes Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." Peter was divinely inspired for his insight as to Jesus the Messiah, but that moment passed and now he is inspired by Satan with his values that of the world.

Jesus next calls the crowd with his disciples and said: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves." This is what it means to be a baptized Christian, growing in and following Jesus. "Take up their cross and follow me." Now let this message from Jesus wash over you and sink in. We are lost on our own, we need to let Jesus take us, remake us, trust in him that he restores us, sinners though we are.

He carries us through suffering, through rejection and through death to resurrection. Contrary to the thinking of the world around us, he tells us those who want to save their lives will lose them, but those who lose their life for his sake and the sake of the gospel, will save them. The reality of our baptisms worked out in our lives.

He asks you what it will profit you to gain the world and lose your life? Of course there's no profit at all, and nothing you can give that will gain your life back. Those who are ashamed of him and his words in this generation will discover that the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in the glory of his Father with the angels.

Now our Lord Jesus knows full well that we have to live in this world, but Jesus also knows we need to be freed from the grasp of the world, selfish wants and desires, letting ourselves be seduced by what we see that seems so attractive in the world around us.

But by the mercy of God, Christ crucified, in grace through faith, we are flooded by the life that streams from the Cross of Christ, from Jesus' resurrection, from the forgiveness of sins and life that flows from our baptisms and at the Lord's Supper. Jesus at the center, our focus on his cross, and my prayer for all of us is that Jesus' teachings surround us in everything we do as his disciples. AMEN