“Who do you say that I am?”

A sermon by The Rev. Rachel Wildman

St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Bedford MA

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Scripture reference: Mark 8:27-38

Today marks the final day of our 3-week observance of the Season of Creation. We won’t stop preaching and praying for our battered Earth, but in focusing so intently on her for these three weeks, many of us are particularly open *this* morning to God’s call to be her stewards. I imagine that for those of us who worshiped together last Sunday, we owe the sermon given by our guest preacher, Lise Hildebrandt, for much of our present fearful awareness of our call to stewardship. Lise held nothing back in her delivery of truth to us last Sunday—like, really—absolutely nothing! She brought all the intensity of the Climate Emergency that surrounds us into this sanctuary and placed it boldly in front of us, proclaiming what most of us know deep down, that, and here I quote her: “We broke the bloody planet.”

And, very unfortunately, the break is so bad that the changes we can each make individually are no longer enough. To quote Katharine Wilkinson, the climate advocate, “We should totally change our lightbulbs and take reusable shopping bags with us to the grocery store, but at the end of the day, we’re talking about wholesale transformation of the global economy.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Wholesale transformation of the global economy. That is HUGE. At this time in our country and in our world, to cling to that as even possible, never mind necessary, is especially huge…Unimaginably huge…Heck! Downright impossibly huge.

You know what else felt impossibly huge? The all powerful God, incarnate as a vulnerable human person…Jesus…the idea of him, too, as even possible, never mind necessary, was impossibly huge.

*“But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.”*

*You are the Messiah.* For us in the year 2021, it’s hard to appreciate the profundity of this proclamation by Peter. Today, we light-heartedly refer to one another as the messiah when we come through in a clutch situation, or gain an exceptional reverence as a leader within a particular group or cause. But, back in Jesus’ day, in the presence of devout Jews, “Messiah” was bold. Peter’s statement was wildly radical, blasphemous even. The Messiah was to be a king who would overthrow the oppressive Roman regime. The Messiah was to be powerful—commander of a strong army powerful—and dominating and noble, of the prominent line of David. For Peter to state that instead, *Jesus* was the Messiah, was utterly unimaginable—Jesus, a guy of lowly birth and little means, a guy whose “army” was a bunch of oddball fisherman, and who at that point in Peter’s discipleship continued to be dismissed by those in power and mocked as an itinerant snakeoil salesman—no way *that* guy was the long-hoped for Messiah who would liberate God’s people.

And yet, in that context, Peter’s experience of Jesus and Jesus’ ministry of healing and reconciliation of those on the margins was so transformative for him that he proclaimed Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah.

Just as God’s Creation is pleading with us so to do, Peter gave up the life *he* knew. Following Jesus meant stepping into an entirely new routine, new ways of being with and for others, a new identity built not on what he did for a living, but on how he lived in community. But, in following Jesus, Peter came to see the impossible as possible! In following Jesus, Peter was empowered to proclaim a truth so monumental—a truth so pregnant with transformation that we still proclaim it today, some 2,000+ years later.

Today’s Gospel passage is for people *just like us*. People who struggle to believe that vulnerability and compassion are transformative enough to truly save the planet. People who are called to join a countercultural movement that means walking away from our society’s norms for the sake of those members of creation--human, animal, plant—who need healing and restoration. Just like Peter, we, too, are staring the impossibility of God’s indwelling in the beings around us, and are asked to affirm it.

Impossible things become possible when love is practiced as Jesus loves. Impossible things become possible when we join God’s movement for liberation and for healing. Impossible things, like the wholesale transformation of the global economy even-- become possible when we live as Jesus’ disciples in this time and place.

PAUSE

At this point in our planet’s brokenness, we are going to lose much from the lives that we know. We already have—right here in Massachusetts just this summer our ability to be outside has been noticeably curtailed by the rain, or the excessive heat, or the tornadoes, or the hurricane, or the vicious mosquitos encouraged by the wetness, or the smoke-filled air from Canadian wildfires, or the sharks in shallow ocean waters. Right here in Massachusetts we’ve already lost precious non-human lives—declining bird, bee, and butterfly populations. We can try to save the life we have always known and lose it anyway as all of this intensifies, or we can leave it for Jesus’ sake—for the sake of equity and justice and healing and restoration—and gain new life for ourselves and for our planet—for our children, and grandchildren, and great grandchildren to come.

We need to act boldly as the church—the Body of Christ— now, participating in every way we can in bringing about a “wholesale transformation of the global economy.” So, let’s figure out what our answer is. Who do *we* say that Jesus is, and how are *we* going to start losing *our* lives the sake of the Gospel?

1. The Takeaway: <https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/takeaway/segments/climate-solutions>, accessed 8/28/21 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)