

**Sermon for August 31, 2014**  
**Matthew**

Heartbreak—we've all experienced it. You might have heard it in the voice of a friend or relative as they talked about a relationship that has ended. I can still remember the heartbreak in my grandpa's voice when he and my grandma told us that she had cancer almost thirty Christmases ago. I hear it now in my mom's voice as she talks about my dad and because of his disease the things he no longer can do or has any interest in doing. She wants him to be as she thinks he should be at this time in their lives.

And if you listen closely to today's gospel reading you can hear the heartbreak in Peter's voice too. Last week Jesus and the disciples were walking twenty five miles north of Galilee in the city of Caesarea Philippi; a Roman stronghold. As they are walking Jesus asks the disciples what the gossip is about him. The disciples answer that people say Jesus is John the Baptist, Elijah or another great prophet. Then Jesus gets to his real question: "Who do you think I am?" In typical Peter brazenness he shouts out that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God!

And here's where Peter's heartbreak begins. Right after Peter's declaration Jesus tells them to tell no one about this. What! This is what Israel has been waiting hundreds of years to hear. Every birth that was from the house of David the parents wondered if this child could be the promised Messiah. And now Jesus doesn't want them to tell anyone!

But it gets worse! "From that time on, Jesus began to show them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and the chief

priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” Being told by Jesus that they can’t tell anyone might have cracked Peter’s heart, but hearing that Jesus must be tortured and killed shattered Peter’s heart completely! The sound of Peter’s heart breaking totally drowns out Jesus’ promise of the resurrection.

It’s no wonder that Peter rebukes Jesus; what Jesus was saying sounded like blasphemy. God’s Messiah was to come from the line of King David the greatest of Israel’s kings. The Messiah was to deliver Israel from Roman oppression like Moses delivered Israel from the Egyptians. The Messiah was not to come to earth to suffer and die. God just wouldn’t allow it to happen!

And to tell the truth we’re not that much different from Peter. We’re looking for a strong God, a God who will defeat our foes—back stabbing coworkers, a lousy job market, persistent diseases. We want a God who will give us fortunes and whatever our hearts desire. We want a God who will protect us from tragedy.

But also like Peter we don’t get the Messiah we want, we get the Messiah we need. We get a Messiah who proclaims a kingdom where losers are blessed, the poor are honored and the least in the eyes of the world are given the greatest honor. To take up our cross and follow Jesus we must completely reverse everything we think about honor, power and blessing. Jesus is not just rebuking Peter, but he is rebuking a world where might makes right and those with the most power and wealth win.

Jesus invites us into that kingdom he proclaims, but it isn’t a very tempting invitation to those who think of themselves as being the independent, self-made

people our society tries to convince us we are. But to those of us who realize that our lives are nothing like the commercials on television; whose lives aren't together, whose families look nothing like the television families, whose disappointments are many—then this invitation is for us. Because of Jesus' life we can imagine a God who understands our fears, knows our pains, frustrations, failures and disappointments—and loves us all the same!

In this kingdom our self worth doesn't come from what we accomplish, but is a gift from God. Our self worth and dignity doesn't come from what or how much we possess, but from being God's beloved children and seeing those around us as our brothers and sisters worth sharing the abundance of our lives with them.

And like Peter our hearts too must shatter completely—dying to the world so that a new one can replace it; a heart that rises to life with Christ in grace and mercy; that beats with a pulse of a God whose love is stronger than sin, fear and death. The heartbeat of this world leads to death and so when Jesus calls us to carry our crosses it's to be prepared for a world that will break our hearts time after time as we conquer hate with love, replace fear with courage and to defeat death with a resurrected life.

No, we aren't getting the God we want; we're getting the God we need. A God who knows our deepest despair and walks with us; a God who knows that our greatest enemy is death and so God died and was raised from the dead for us; a God who comes to us in the vulnerability of a babe in a manger and died as a criminal on a cross so that we may live a life filled with grace and mercy so that we may share that love with the world.