



Discussion questions for week 6: Shock and Horror

Take some time before you meet in your group (or before reflecting on these questions yourself) to read this week's passage, Mark 8:22-9:1.

1. According to Mark 8:27, Jesus was near Caesarea Philippi when he conversed with the disciples about his identity. This city was a predominantly Gentile community in the Roman Empire. It was named after Herod Philip, the son of King Herod the Great, and the Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus. As its name implies, Caesarea Philippi was dedicated politically and religiously to Roman rule. It even had a temple dedicated to honoring Caesar. Given its location and significance to the Roman Empire, what reason, or reasons, might Jesus have had for engaging in a discussion about his identity in this location?
2. In Mark 8:29, Jesus asks the disciples, "Who do you say I am?" Why is this question important? Who do you say Jesus is, and how has your answer to that question changed over time?
3. In this week's passage, Jesus predicts his death, which is met with "shock and horror." Peter refused to accept this news (Mark 8:32). Though you might not be able to imagine yourself rebuking Jesus to his face as Peter does, in what ways can your daily actions have the same effect?
4. Reread Mark 8:34-38. In these verses, Jesus introduces the disciples to the way of the cross. What do these verses teach us about being a follower of Jesus? What reasons does Jesus give for why people should follow him down this hard road?
5. How has your relationship with Jesus affected your lifestyle? Relationships? Priorities? Politics?

6. In 1960, Martin Luther King Jr. wrote an article for the Christian Century reflecting on his suffering. He says:

"My personal trials have also taught me the value of unmerited suffering. As my sufferings mounted I soon realized that there were two ways that I could respond to my situation: either to react with bitterness or seek to transform the suffering into a creative force. I decided to follow the latter course. Recognizing the necessity for suffering I have tried to make of it a virtue."

What do you think King means by "creative force?" Can you think of a time when you transformed your suffering into a "creative force?"

7. Viktor Frankl, an Austrian psychologist and holocaust survivor, wrote that "despair is suffering without meaning." According to Mark 8:34-35, what meaning can be found in suffering?

Practice for the week: Sacred Reading of Scripture – Mark 8:34-38

This is a way of praying with Scripture that has been used for centuries by followers of Jesus and is often called *Lectio Divina*, which is Latin for sacred or divine reading. A regular practice of *Lectio Divina* cultivates the ability to listen deeply to Scripture and allow God's presence to open our lives. It helps us listen for the still small voice of God speaking to us personally here and now, and to grow in awareness of God's presence with us, in us and around us. We interact with the text of Scripture but unlike Bible study we do not analyze or dissect it. We listen in quiet and allow the words to settle into us as we quiet our thinking to receive them deeply into our hearts.

There are many ways to engage with *Lectio Divina*, but four steps are commonly used: read, meditate, respond, and rest. (If you prefer to listen to the Scripture rather than read it, there are some great apps and websites for that, such as www.biblegateway.com.)

Read: Read the passage of Scripture. This is best done slowly and intentionally with an awareness of God's presence speaking through the text. Simply listen for God's voice in this moment. Don't search or seek out the meaning on your own, but rather wait, and listen for something to emerge. When a word or phrase seems to settle on you, take it in and just sit with it in silence.

Meditate: Read the text again for the purpose of "hearing" or "seeing" God in it. This is a deep searching of the heart. Ponder it, reflect on it, ask how this is applicable to your own experience, your own life? How is God reaching you right now, speaking to you in the word or phrase?

Respond: The third reading is for the purpose of responding back to God, expressing honestly whatever is happening in your heart and spirit as a result of listening. There may be joy, tears, awe, reverence, even confusion - give any emotion or thought that arises freely to God at this time. And listen for how God might want you to turn, move or act because of what you've heard.

Rest: Finally, let your mind and emotions settle to rest in silence and simply seek to love and be loved by God. Anytime distracting thoughts arise, just return to the word that stood out in the reading, and repeat it, and allow other thoughts to fade. Allow this "sacred word" to symbolize all your love for God, and your willingness to give God all your attention. Sit in the presence of God and use the word as a window through which to gaze upon God and to allow the light and love of God to stream into your heart and spirit.