

What's in Your Wallet?

Mark 8:27-38

²⁷ Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" ²⁸ And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." ²⁹ He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." ³⁰ And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

³¹ Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

³⁴ He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶ For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷ Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸ Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

This morning I examined my wallet and this is what I found: my Michigan driver license, two bank account cards, three credit cards, 3 medical insurance cards, 1 road service card, one pharmacy reward card, one gift card for office supplies and another to a coffee shop, one warehouse club card, two frequent flyer rewards cards, one AARP membership card, a "tipping at a glance" card, several medical appointment cards, business cards (others and my own), my "ordained minister" card from the Michigan Region that says I am in good standings until December 31st of this year, and \$23 in cash. These may tell someone finding my wallet a little about who I am!

I don't know whether I have mentioned it before, but one of things I have been doing at Goodwill Industries of Greater Detroit for the last year or so is doing some financial education and coaching – sometimes for customers and sometimes for employees. We discuss various topics:

- Money management – like living within our means and paying our bills on time;

- Establishing, building and maintaining an emergency fund – for those things that come up unexpectedly;
- Establishing or rebuilding credit – so we can make major purchases and pay for them in a reasonable amount of time, and without paying back several times more than the item is worth;
- We also talk about the advantages and cautions of using credit cards.

Recently I have been looking for a new credit card because Leroy and I have a major purchase that requires financial wisdom. In order to get a credit card we have had to tell all our business! This has reminded us of that commercial where Samuel L. Jackson asks “what is in your wallet?” Not only will you have purchasing power – but how will that financial institution reward you for using their card. The commercial implies “what’s in your wallet” says a great deal about who you are!

It is true! Financial institutions want to know you, but lots of others want to know you also. When strangers meet, there is a fairly standard ritual followed as we seek to get acquainted. It begins with the names, of course. Then follow the questions: Where do you live? Are you married and do you have a family? Where did you grow up? What is your job? Where did you go to school? What are your hobbies? A stranger turns into an acquaintance and we get a sense of who the other person is when we gain a context.

But if the relationship develops, there are other insights to be gained: the values that shape behavior and decisions; the vision of success that provides the sense of direction; the awareness of whether the other is trustworthy, whether the other has integrity, whether the other treats people with dignity and compassion. Thus an acquaintance turns into a friend. And with further experience, a friend may turn into a life companion.

But there are limits to how much we can know about another person. In everyone there are secrets of the heart that will not be revealed or that cannot be discerned. Even two people who have lived together in a wonderfully shared marriage for half a century and more will find there are surprises in the other, and ever new insights to be gained. It

is the wonder of life in human community that people are endlessly fascinating as they express in attitude and word and deed who they are.

In today's Scripture lesson, Mark pictures a scene that takes place some considerable time after Jesus and his disciples had begun their relationship with each other. Jesus began that moment in their life together by asking the disciples what they had heard people say about him. People obviously had been talking about him, because the disciples had something to report. Then Jesus moved to the critical question: "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered. From what he had come to know of Jesus, from what he had seen Jesus do, from what he had heard Jesus say, he affirmed, "You are the Messiah." Jesus seemed to accept this title that Peter used.

On the basis of our relationship with Jesus, on the basis of what we have come to know of him in the biblical witness and in the life of the Christian community, we make our own assessment and judgment about who he is. There are many titles or descriptions that we can use. We too can call him Christ or Messiah. We can call him Lord, Savior, Master, Friend, Teacher, Prophet, Son of God, Redeemer, Example, Standard.

But then in this exchange with Peter and the other disciples, Jesus said a rather strange thing: "he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him" ([v. 30](#)). Why not? Why not tell others about him? There may be reasons we do not understand why Jesus admonished his disciples so strongly to keep quiet about him, but the subsequent conversation with Peter suggests at least one reason. It comes clear that when Peter called him the Messiah, he may have had the right title but the wrong understanding of what the title meant for Jesus. When Jesus declared "quite openly" that he was going to suffer and be rejected and be killed, Peter did not want to hear that. We wonder if Peter even heard the last part of Jesus' statement, the part about rising after three days. Peter did not want to hear about a suffering Messiah. He apparently was looking for a Messiah who would establish God's rule with power and authority, and who would bring his followers glory and reward.

The experience of Peter serves as an alert for us. We can indeed use our experience of relating to other people as an analogy for how we can relate to Jesus, and we can express our understanding of who he is for us in various ways. But when we speak of Jesus and who he is for us, we need to do so with the humility and the reserve that comes from awareness that we may have the title right but may not fully understand its meaning. What does it mean for us if we call Jesus Savior? What does it mean for us if we call Jesus Son of God? What does it mean for us if we too call Jesus Messiah?

Jesus told Peter that he was getting it wrong because "you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." Of course Peter was looking at things from a human perspective; he was a man, after all. How else could he look at things? How else could he understand Jesus except from a human perspective? We bring our humanity to our relationship with Jesus as well. We see him as one who will support our human wants and desires. We see him as one who will sustain the values we want to enhance. We see him as one who will enable us to become what we want to become.

But Jesus' word to Peter suggested that he could and must gain another perspective, that he could set his mind on "divine things." In our relationship with Jesus, there is the promise and the hope that somehow the divine perspective on who we are and what we are about breaks through. In him God enables us to find a way that is different from the way of the world, enables us to discern how life is fulfilled as God intends, enables us to live by values that are not embodied in the normal course of human affairs.

Jesus put God's perspective in stark terms for Peter and for us. We are to deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow him into a life of serving and giving and sacrificing. Then the promise: "those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it." **Harry B. Adams**

So, I guess it does not matter what's in our wallet, but who is your Lord and Savior...then we can go out into the world and share God's good news and Christ's saving power!

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