

Lent 2, Year B  
Mark 8: 31-38  
March 8, 2009

Trinity Episcopal Church  
Sonoma, CA

A Question of Choice:  
A Sermon Preached by the Rev. Susan Allison-Hatch

There is a Taize chant that goes like this: Ubi Caritas et amor, Ubi Caritas, Deus ibi est. It means, when love and charity prevail, God himself is there.

I've been singing this chant to myself all week long. It helps in times like these—times when the very foundations of our lives seem to be shaking, times of seemingly relentless bad news on the economic front, times when the shape of the future isn't at all clear, times when things feel like they're spinning out of control, times that breed fear and anxiety and all the poisons that can come from that deadly mix.

And we all have times in our lives that breed fear. Times that make us anxious. Times that threaten to pull the rug out right out from under us. In such times it's only natural to want to hold on to as much as we can. To limit the number of unknowns. To control the outcome. To grab on to what we can and hold tight.

I think that's what Peter was struggling with when he heard Jesus talk of his suffering and his death. Peter was afraid. Afraid of losing what he had come to love. Afraid of what might happen to him. Afraid of things spinning out of control.

Is it any surprise that he rebuked Jesus? Is it any surprise that he tried to dissuade Jesus from his course? Is it any surprise that he tried to hold tight to what he knew? Peter's mind was on human things. Fear. Anxiety. Panic even.

How does Jesus respond? By offering the disciples, including Peter, and the crowd a choice—a choice between things human and things divine. A choice between life driven by fear and life driven by faith.

The essence of the Gospel we hear today is this question of choice—the choices we make each day, each moment. Choices between yielding to fear and walking in faith. We all make those choices all of the time. Sometimes we choose fear and sometimes we choose faith.

Perhaps you have heard Garrison Keillor's program, *Prairie Home Companion*. It's a radio program with a hodge-podge of features—blue grass music, gospel music, radio drama, the long-running tale of Keillor's mythical hometown—Lake Wobegone, Minnesota. The program even has mythical sponsors—Powder-milk biscuits, Ralph's Pretty Good Grocery, and my favorite, the Fear-Mongers Shop—a shop that caters to fears careening out of control.

We live in a world like that Fear-Mongers Shop—a world that preys on, fosters and profits by our fears. A world that promotes our fears—our fears of those who are not like us, our fears of the unknown, our fears of the future. A world of moats and security alarms and bells going off. A world that seals us off from one another and from God.

I know that world. I've lived in it. I've spent time with the doors of my heart barred to those who might enter and steal from me the little control I had. I've spent sleepless nights and restless days barricaded behind doors that offer the illusion of protection. I know the toll a life of all-consuming fear takes. The wariness, the watchfulness, the way that fear deadens your soul.

But that is not the way of life Jesus calls us to. Jesus invites us into a different way of living and being in the world. A way that doesn't cower before crosses meant to intimidate. A way of living that reaches out not in fear but in love. A way of living in into God's hope and God's love. A way of living into God's reign.

A way of living that recognizes that while there are many good reasons to fear there is never reason for fear to trump faith, hope or love.

You and I, we live in challenging times. We live in times that call into question all that we have relied on, all that we have held certain. We live in times that breed fear and anxiety. But we also live in times that call us to a life where charity and love prevail. Remember, where charity and love prevail, God himself is there.

Please join me in singing *Ubi Caritas et amor. Ubi Caritas, Deus ibi est.*