

**Mark 1:9-13**

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.' And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

**Mark 15:33-39**

When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land (*earth*); until three in the afternoon. At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, 'Listen, he is calling for Elijah.' And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.' Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he cried out and breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was God's Son!'

**“Jesus God’s Son”****Rev. Charles Schuster****March 2, 2008**

Anybody know what an Ebenezer is? You do? It's a rock? Thank you. I first heard this, I think, from Paul Harvey, so it must be true. But apparently Bill Bradley and a friend were having lunch in one of those downscale restaurants, you know the kind, where you have paper tablecloths and plastic forks, and the menu is mainly on the apron of the cook. And in a very polite manner, Bradley asked the waitress if she would bring him another pat of butter for the dinner roll he was having trouble choking down, it was a bit dry. She must have forgotten the request because she did not return with the butter, and Bill's friend walked over to her and called her over to the table and said, "Do you know who this is? This is Bill Bradley. He is a graduate of Princeton University, he was an all-American basketball player, and he played in the NBA for the New York Knicks, and he was an all-star. He has written many books. He was a Rhoads scholar. He was a presidential candidate. He's currently in charge of the nation's defense." And the waitress looked at the two of them and said, "Do you know who I am? My name is Susan. I work at this restaurant, and I'm in charge of butter, and you'll have some when I want to bring it to you."

Who is this man? Who is this woman? The people of Jerusalem wondered. It's in the Gospel of Matthew. "And the whole town was stirring when he came into Jerusalem, and they were asking each other, "Who is this man?" James Kay, reflecting on this passage in his book *The Seasons of Hope*, he says this: "Jerusalem was shaken up, shaken to its foundation. Jesus emerged into the city from rumor and anonymity to high-profile

visibility, and all of Jerusalem was thrown into turmoil. Who is this? He comes into our city, into our temple, he comes not to oppress us with the love of power, but to confront us with the power of love. Who is this man Jesus?" The Gospel writer John tells us that Jesus is the son of God. "For God so loved the world that God gave us this only-begotten son." Who is this man Jesus? Is it God's son? Did he think he was God's son? Do we think Jesus was God's son? And if we do, what does that mean?

Jesus was God's son. I think we believe that he was God's son. We may want to spend some time thinking about what that implies. It is in all the Gospels, and it's in the Gospel of Mark. It's in the beginning of the book, and at the end Jesus is God's son. Mark's gospel doesn't speak of Jesus' birth, it begins with his baptism. Jesus was named the son of God. It's the first Gospel written. Mark was the first Gospel written, and in the first chapter of the first Gospel written, "On the day Jesus was baptized, John the Baptist baptized him, and the heavens opened, and the voice of God was heard to say, 'That is my son.'" When we look with care at this, the text shows us why, and the why is important. He was called the son of God because he made a choice. He chose to have John baptize him, and that was remarkable. He who was without sin, he chose to let John baptize him. He who was the light of the world chose to let his light shine on John. At the most important point in his young life, when he could have called attention to himself, he yielded to John. And in many ways, if at that stage in his life, someone would have given him an award, he would have been named for best supporting actor.

It was a choice he made, an important choice. It defined him. Sometimes, you know, the most important thing we do is to step back and let someone else do the most important thing. Sometimes our best action is to refrain from acting, because when we walk in the light of God we don't need to bask in the spotlight of fame. Because when we know what's what, we don't need our names to be put in *Who's Who*. When we make the right choices, our success is measured by what we enable others to do because of us. Any person in love understands fulfillment comes when the one we love is fulfilled. Any parent who cares and loves without conditions, does not live vicariously through their children, but stands with pride when their children are victorious. Leaders know what they can do best, and sometimes good leaders, great leaders, step back so someone can learn to do something better, and it's difficult. When George Bush, that's the President's father, was Vice President, he said, "It's so important for a Vice President not to upstage his boss. You don't know how hard it's been over these years to keep my charisma in check."

The choices we make define us. Kathleen Townsend, the choices she made were assisted by her father, something he wrote when she was young. It's in her book, *Failing America's Faithful*. "I was in music class and Mother Mahaney came to tell me the news. I immediately went home, where already many friends of my parents had gathered. I was too young to understand fully, but I did understand that we had been struck by an enormous loss. My uncle had died. My normally loud and laughing home was now hushed. I went upstairs to my parents' room and we discussed what had happened. On the day my uncle was buried, my father gave me a note that was hand-written on that day. He was devastated. He spent most of the time trying to comfort my aunt and my cousins, but what he wrote to me did not convey fear or anger or bitterness. He focused on the future

and my duty to the family and the country. 'Dear Kathleen, you understand, I know, you understand that Jack died, and you were there and you were a big help when he was buried today. As the oldest Kennedy grandchild, you have a particular responsibility. Be kind to others. Work for your country. Love, Daddy.'" Robert Kennedy to his daughter Kathleen.

She made a choice that carried her into public life and eventually to the governor's mansion in Maryland. She made a choice based on some things that her father said. She heard him say one time as he was interviewed on TV, she heard him say, "You know, however bad it is, there's always somebody who has it worse. Don't feel sad for yourself. You can always find someone who has suffered more, has faced something more difficult." Kathleen says, "For God's sake and for our own, we must lift our gaze, individually and collectively, beyond ourselves." There are choices we make. We can choose to shine our light, or we can turn our light on someone else and let them shine. When Jesus asked John to baptize him, when Jesus could have been the baptizer himself, he let his light shine on John. All his life, he made that choice, and people rose to new heights when he raised the spectrum of opportunity. It was the blind who could see because of him, it was the deaf who could hear because of him. It was prisoners who were free because of him. From the beginning of his ministry at age 30, he made choices and the people around him were better people because of him.

And so God said, "This is my son." That's one reason Jesus is the son of God. At the end of his life, Mark tells us about the end of his life, it happened at the foot of the cross. A Roman soldier, one of the ones who had mocked him, a Roman soldier looked at him. When Jesus died the soldier said, "This man is God's son." Was that because of the way he died as a victor, without complaint? Maybe? Was it the power of love that confronted the love of power? Maybe, perhaps, that was it. I think the reason the Roman soldier saw it, because the Roman soldier knew it, that Jesus made a choice and that choice led to a cross. Jesus had a cross and he carried it. It was an attitude that led to an action. His friends objected. They said, "Don't go into Jerusalem at Passover. It's a dangerous time. It's a dangerous town. Stay away from there." But there comes a time in every life when we have to act. There comes a time in our lives when we must step forward and risk, otherwise we die. Otherwise we die.

Ken Duncan tells the story of a six-year-old boy walking with his grandmother, and they decided to take a shortcut, and the shortcut took them through the cemetery. David noticed all the dates on the tombstones and asked his grandmother about that, and his grandmother explained, "The first number is the date of their birth and the second number is the date that they died." "Why do some of those tombstones have only one date?" David asked. His grandmother told him, "Because those people haven't died yet." Later that night back home, at the dinner table, David made a startling observation to his parents. "Mom, Dad, guess what? Some of those people buried down there at the cemetery aren't dead." Sadly, there's truth in that. Some of us, if we haven't found a cause to live for, we will have come to the tragic realization of being buried by the burden of life. Some of us have come to think the measure of life is in the passage of time. It never is the number of years, it's the quality that we put in the years.

Robert Frost once wrote, “Something we were withholding made us very weak, and then we realized it was ourselves. We do not withhold ourselves.” Jen discovered it. Jen has been a person of privilege all her life. Her parents have given her everything she wanted, whenever she wanted it. She had no cause and no cross. Some have seen her as willful, some have called her spoiled, a brat. She lived in a glass house. Jen has never had to go a day without a meal because there was no food. She has never had to put off some present pleasure for some delayed gratification. She has never been in the really hard places of life. I doubt if she ever met a homeless person. I doubt if she ever cleaned toilets in a slum or carried food to a group of refugees. But as for sacrifice and bearing a cross, she would seem to know nothing of that, at least that’s how it would seem. Somehow Jen picked up a cross. It happened working for UNICEF, and it involved children with HIV in Latin America. She’s gotten involved with children who contracted HIV and has written a book about a young girl who contracted HIV from her mother, and her mother died at a very early age. She has written a book about Anna, and was so impressed with Anna’s maturity and confidence, so inspired by her positive outlook despite her infection. Maybe it was her vitality and beauty, she seemed so full of life, maybe that was it. But Jen has learned so much from Anna, and she has come to a point in her life where the privilege that she knew is not nearly as important as the difference she wants to make, or at least try to make. In fact, this is her cause, and her cross, and she wants to help all of us to carry our crosses. And in her book, *Anna’s Story: A Journey of Hope*, Jenna, a young woman of privilege who has found a way to carry a cross, Jenna, a young woman who has found her way out of her glass house, her white glass house, she is the twin daughter of Laura and George and they currently live in the White House, Jenna Bush carries a cross. “Every child,” she says, “deserves a chance for a better life. We can make a difference. We have the power to help kids find strength and hope, just as Anna has.” And there are so many ways we can do it. It need not be a grand gesture that requires lots of trouble or money. Simple signs of friendship to change the lives of those who live on what she calls the outskirts of society. A cause, a cross.

There is a cross we can carry, a step we can take, an attitude we can grow into an action. It could be a small thing that is really large. It could be a behind-the-scenes kind of thing, that may never make it to center stage. It could be a soft word when what comes to mind is a verbal revenge. It could be a kind act to a person who really doesn’t deserve it. It could be having the courage to act on what we know is right when we are the only one who knows it. A cross. A cause. If we pick up the cross, then we take up a cause, and we walk without fear, prepared to live as fully as freedom will grant us, prepared to love as completely as perfect love that always casts away hatred. Prepared to let go of ancient bias and long-remembered hurt. There’s a cross out there we can pick up. There’s a cause out there that we can make ours.

When Edward Everett Hale served as chaplain of the Senate, his cause was prayer. His life was devotion. That was his cross, and his cause, and someone asked him if he ever prayed for the senators, and if so, what did he pray? He said, “No, I usually don’t pray for the senators. But when I look at the senators, I pray for the country.” Jesus was God’s son because he carried a cross. He moved from a place that was comfortable to a place that

was uncertain. He picked up a cause, the cause of faith, and he turned over the tables of the temple because the faith was reserved only for the few, and he believed in the God of the many. And Jesus, at the end of his life, carried a cross and the Roman soldier saw it, and said of it, "This is God's son." Jesus, we believe, was God's son. At his baptism, the choices he made to shine his light on others so they could shine; at his death, the cross he carried to move from a place of comfort to a place of uncertainty and to a difference that he could make in the world. And then, at the biggest stage of all, in the upper room, in the Passover meal, the Lamb of God, the one we call the Son of God, look at what he did. He took the bread and he broke it. "This is my body," he said. "Take and eat." And the cup of wine, grapes crushed, fermented – "This is my blood. This is the new covenant with God. Drink this. If I am your son of God, if you take the bread, and if you drink of the cup, then I live in you. And if I am your son of God, and if I live in you, doesn't that make you the daughter and the son of God? And if so, then you make the right choices, and you carry your cross as well.