



**First Church in Cambridge, Congregational, UCC**  
Second Sunday in Lent  
March 12, 2006

*Setting Your Mind*

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**The Lessons: Mark 8:31-38**

March 12th, 1930. 76 years ago. Mahatma Gandhi and 78 of his followers began their historic Salt March to the coastal village of Dandi, some 240 miles from their starting point at an ashram in Ahmedabad. The march grew in numbers as it passed through cities and villages. It was a carefully planned, incisively executed non-violent protest of the salt tax imposed in colonial India. Under British rule, the sale or production of salt by anyone but the British was a criminal offense punishable by law, a law that secured wealth for the British, denied the Indians a needed resource and added to the impoverishment of millions. The march lasted for 23 days. When Gandhi reached the shore in Dandi on April 6<sup>th</sup>, he picked up a small lump of natural salt and declared, “With this, I am shaking the foundations of the British Empire.” He then boiled it in water to produce the commodity, which no Indian could legally produce—salt. He implored his followers to make salt wherever they could do so “conveniently and comfortably” along the seashore. Salt was soon “illegally” sold all along the coast of India. Over the course of that April, the British government incarcerated over sixty thousand people for the offense, the last of which was Gandhi himself. As you know, the Salt March to Dandi would become a key turning point in India’s struggle for independence.

One year ago today, on the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Gandhi Foundation staged a re-enactment of the Salt March. The event was known as the “International Walk for Peace, Justice and Freedom.” Gandhi’s great-grandson Tushar Gandhi and several hundred fellow marchers followed the same route to Dandi, taking the full 23 days to walk it. Apparently, the similarities to the original march ended there. Commentators lamented the fact that the event had turned into something of spectacle. The start of the March was attended by the Chairperson of the National Advisory Council and nearly half of the Indian cabinet. Would it surprise you to learn that those cabinet members who walked at all went just a few kilometers before returning to their hotels?

“For you are setting your mind not on divine things, but on human things,” says Jesus in our passage for today. Peace, Justice and Freedom? They sound like divine things to me. Hotels? Not so much. What I wonder is this: How did those politicians decide when to turn back? What were their minds set on when they turned back to their hotels, walking back on the same pathway some 75 years after Gandhi walked on to transform the entire history of their country. Of course, India had already achieved independence decades ago, but the socio-economic disparities are still there. Did these leaders feel some pang of sadness or regret or even inadequacy? Did they wonder what it must have been like to hold in the palm of their hands the power to shake the foundations of an empire? I ask these questions not to berate the leaders. I have no idea what all was happening in India a year ago today. I ask it because I wonder if I myself would have stayed the course of the 240-mile walk. More deeply, I ask it because I wonder how any of us do at setting our minds on divine things, whether it means walking with Gandhi, or Gandhi’s great grandson, or even Jesus himself.

“Get behind me, Satan. For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” Here we have the full text of Jesus’ rebuke of Peter who, after identifying Jesus as the Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah, fails to comprehend what Jesus says next, namely that he would need undergo great suffering, and rejection, execution and death. Peter was confused. Suffering and death? For him? For me? Either way, this is not what Peter wants to hear. Excuse me, can you point me to the nearest hotel, I’m bushed!

Friends, today is the Second Sunday of Lent, a season in which First Church is turning its attention to the spiritual practice of discernment. As individuals and as a community, in 10 O’clock hours, small groups, and at our retreat last week, we have been experimenting with time honored traditions of prayerful listening to where God may be leading us and prompting movement in virtually every aspects of our lives. It could be in our jobs, or in our relationships or families, or in our shared life together as a church community. Since very few of us have a direct line to the mind of the Almighty, we have

to work together, to discern how and where we can be more involved in God's work in and through our lives and our world. Listening to those God-given murmurs and yearnings deep within us requires plenty of silence and also patience and trusted friends who can serve as a further sounding board through which the Spirit can resonate.

Our text from Mark offers a further invitation to consider discernment, though in a decidedly more focused way. Jesus' line to Peter: "For you are setting your mind not on divine things but human things," begs the classic discernment question: How can we set our mind on divine things and how can we keep it set there? Another question is like it. How do we know the difference between what God may be trying to tell us and what other voices in our world and in our heart are trying to tell us? Unfortunately, Jesus offers no instruction manual, no easy steps. He does, however, give us a glimpse at what shape our lives will begin to take when we do surrender our control and let God lead us in the paths of righteousness. Jesus maps out a cycle of events or experiences, we might even call them signposts on our faith journey, with which he expects his followers to become closely acquainted.

See if you've been able to read any of these signs in your life's walk recently. The pattern is like this (and we can presume it's more or less in this order). First, suffering. Then, rejection. Then, death. Then, resurrection. If you were expecting something a little less heavy, a little warmer, a little more spiritual perhaps, maybe you and Peter should have a cup of coffee. If you think you already know this story and that what I'm saying here is obvious if you know Jesus life, remember, this is pattern laid down for all of us who want to follow him. In this passage, Jesus leaves very little wiggle room. Suffering. Rejection. Death. Resurrection. There are no two ways about it. This is it – the way of Jesus.

As we get more seasoned in this practice of discernment, of listening for God in our human experience of sorrow and joy, of desolation and consolation, of locating ourselves within the way of Christ, we may begin to detect a faint trace of this pattern in our own lives. As we strive to do the right thing, as we learn about pain and grief, as we come to know God's peace, justice and freedom in our hearts, as we learn to keep our egos, fears and insecurities in check, what began as a trace may become a line and then perhaps a groove and then finally a path where upon which there is no turning back. We may even realize that Jesus has been walking with us all along. The signposts may become clearer to read, or to discern Suffering. Rejection. Death. Resurrection.

Each and every year, the church invites us to follow Jesus, to be his disciple. You might say we are invited to re-enact his march. Our liturgical seasons and holy days can be for us checkpoints to remind us we are called to walk with Jesus. The path is littered

with those who have tried to follow and those who have failed, folks just like you and me. We can find ourselves a few kilometers outside of Bethlehem. We see a sign of tension, conflict or suffering that this trip will inevitably entail, we take a step backwards and wonder if that inn we passed on our way out of town might finally have some room for us!

To bring ourselves in step with God's purpose for our lives and for our world, to let Jesus walk with us, we need to set our mind on discerning the ways this pattern is playing out on the ground in each of our lives. The suffering to which Jesus calls us is a suffering rooted in deep compassion. The rejection is a rejection rooted in deep conviction. The dying is the painful dying of our ego, of our fears, of our insecurities. The resurrection is the resurrection of a new life and a new hope that inspires us to keep on walking. We see the pattern clearly in the lives of Jesus and even of Gandhi. We may know this pattern is a container that holds everything that is real and true and meaningful in this world. Yet how often do we set our mind to living this pattern? How much richer and more fulfilling would our lives be if we did? Suffering rooted in compassion with the least of these. As we walk with Jesus, we will grow in solidarity with the poor and the sick, with the elderly and little children, with victims and with perpetrators, until there is no spiritual distance between us and the poorest person in our world. The rejection of conviction. As we walk with them, we will find courage to take risks, to stand our ground and to shake the foundations of the powers and principalities that keep us from realizing the promise of God's kingdom. The dying of our egos. As we walk ever mindful of God's spirit and grace, the desires of our ego – for power, for recognition, for a strong self-image will give way to the agenda of our soul which is for creativity and for transformation and for deep connection. The resurrection of new possibilities and new beginnings. No matter how many times an old self dies and a new one emerges, God's love will abide even through death. We are assured that the journey will never, ever cut us off or leave us stranded and that we will never, ever walk alone and therein we find a peace, love, hope and joy that the world cannot give. The more we are able to live by Christ's example, the more steadfast our resolve will be, the longer we will be able to endure, whether for a few miles or 240. This is the path is the road to which all our pathways of discernment will lead. The work we have to do is find where in our lives God is working to draw us in step with Jesus that we might together with God in Christ come to shake the foundations of empires and "of human things!"

Listen to your lives. Take the time and prayerful quiet, find the companionship that can help you discern in your own experiences the pattern: Suffering. Rejection. Death. Resurrection. It is the pattern that God's love and healing grace made known

through Jesus is inviting us all to follow. It is the divine pattern to which we are each called to set our minds, our hearts, our bodies and souls.

In closing, I leave with you the prayer we sang just a few minutes ago. May it be for us a mantra throughout this Lenten season of discernment.

Lead me, Lord, lead me in thy righteousness, make thy way plain before my face.  
Amen.