

## Proper 19, Year B

- Have a story to tell about my son, Elias
- But first, there are a few things you have to know about him for it to make sense
- First is that he wears his heart on his sleeve - he feels everything - and feels it deeply
- So when he's scared or worried or overwhelmed, it sort of takes him over - and often what I'll end up having to do is reassure him, by holding him and telling him, "I got you. I got you."
- Second is that he's had something called a strabismus - basically his eyes are slightly crossed - brain has to make a choice, double vision or just use one eye mainly - so can lead to a lazy eye or loss of vision in non-dominant eye (this is why you may have seen him wearing a patch some mornings that he's been here - helps strengthen his off eye)
- And so I didn't mean to keep this a secret, but Elias had eye surgery Friday to hopefully rectify that condition
- It went well and he's healthy and back at home, but we won't know for months if the surgery was successful, so I would be grateful for your continued prayers for his recovery and that it was indeed a success
- While isn't always successful, can require multiple surgeries, it is a relatively routine procedure - but still somewhat terrifying as a parent to go through - something deeply difficult about having your child carted away and just have to wait there in the waiting room for news
- Now Friday was also, it turns out, feast of the Church we call Holy Cross Day
- So as I was waiting there for good news from the doctors operating on my son, I was trying to think about what I was going to preach this morning - and I thought about the meaning of that feast, Holy Cross Day - how strange it seems, at first glance, to have a feast day celebrating that instrument of torture
- And I also thought about the question that Jesus asks Peter and the rest of the disciples in our Gospel lesson this morning: "Who do you say that I am?"
- And of course I realized, sitting there, that it's no coincidence that immediately after Peter gives the right answer ("You are the Messiah"), Jesus foretells his passion and resurrection
- Mark and the version of Scripture we read, I think, do us a disservice here - If you're anything like me, you've often viewed these as two isolated episodes - he almost sets them up this way
- "Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." And he sternly ordered them not to tell

anyone about him. (Paragraph break)

**Then** he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering...”

- Makes it seem like these are two different, unrelated moments
- But the truth is, one of them flows logically from the other - because Jesus is the Messiah, he says, he has to undergo great suffering, and be killed, and after three days rise again
- But for the disciples, and for us, this is unexpected
- It's not what would be expected of a Messiah
- Even with passages of prophecy like the one we hear from Isa this morning, one of the famous servant songs, those prophecies of Isaiah's which foretold the coming of Christ and of his suffering - passages like, "I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting."
- Those are prophecies we had to go back and look for, after the fact, because everyone expected the Messiah to be victorious, to be glorious, to conquer in God's name
- And instead, we get this: Jesus foretelling suffering, and death - and not just any death, but death on a cross
- It's what theologians have called the scandal of the cross
- And it. Is. scandalous.
- So much so that Peter actually rebukes Jesus over it - tells Jesus no, this can't be, this isn't what it means to be the Messiah
- And for that, Peter gets compared to Satan - so we know: probably shouldn't agree too strongly with Peter here, even if we're tempted to, or we see his point
- Jesus's rebuke of Peter saying that can't happen, that isn't who the Messiah is supposed to be, basically tells us, that **is** who the Messiah is meant to be - Jesus says this is what has to happen - why on earth might that be?
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- So there's more to that story about Elias's surgery, but I have to warn you there's a chance I'll get a little bit emotional finishing it
- Because as I sat there with Elias as he was recovering from the surgery, still loopy from the anesthesia, and probably in more than his fair share of discomfort, I was still worrying - hoping that it was in fact successful, hoping that he heals well and quickly, that there aren't any complications, worried that he might have some pain ahead of him - he reached out his hand, and grabbed my finger, and he said to me, "I got you"
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- So as I sat there weeping (ugly crying) in that hospital room, I realized that in a sense, that is the meaning of the cross, that is why the cross is necessary
- Because that's what the cross is - God himself, nailed to a tree, with arms spread wide enough to embrace all of humankind
- The cross is God telling us, once and for all, "I got you"
- And telling us that not from a seat of glory, not from some moment of victory, but from the suffering and agony that God came to know in Christ
- I realized at that moment that I don't know about you, but I couldn't worship a God who knew only triumph, and not tragedy
- If our suffering, our anguish, were outside of God's concern, outside of God's direct knowledge, then I don't know how we could look each other in the eyes during those moments of pain and believe that God truly loved us
- But because of what we know Jesus went through, what Jesus had to go through, we know that there is no moment of suffering in which God is not present in our midst - suffering with us, and holding us, and telling us, "I got you. I got you."