

## “The Great Paradox Revisited”

Mark 8:31-38

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I had a bowl of lobster bisque a week ago Friday at lunchtime, and late that afternoon, I was still savoring its taste and texture. I like the way certain delicacies stay with me throughout the day.

The same can be said for a great teaching. Wisdom has a way of catching our attention and clinging to us for the rest of the day or the rest of the week or maybe the rest of our lives. So it is with the Great Paradox. **If you want to save your life, you must lose it.** When I hear this Great Paradox spoken by Jesus, I instantly know an eternal truth is being revealed, yet it also feels like a grand conundrum, a tangled knot wanting to be unraveled. Lose my life in order to find it? Like the lobster bisque, it gets a hold of me and won't go away until I have wrestled with it long enough.

As I pondered this text this week, I was led to the opening line of the Prayer of Saint Francis, “Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.” I read that opening line, and I was halted right there. I couldn't continue beyond those first words. They seemed to be what I needed to unravel the knot of the Great Paradox. “Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.”

To lose one's life is to surrender to being used by God for God's own purpose. In so doing, one discovers an abundance of life otherwise hidden. A physician surrenders her life to God and finds her practice takes on a whole new meaning. An attorney surrenders his life to God, and his professional life takes him to places he had never imagined. A stay at home dad surrenders his life to God, and he discovers he actually has a soul.

A social worker surrenders her life to God and she finds she is no longer exhausted at the end of each day. An auto body repair guy surrenders his life to God and he begins to see his customers as his brothers and sisters. A checker at the grocery store surrenders her life to God and she becomes the soul mate of the one shopping with food stamps. “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.”

In 1970, I began to do this kind of sorting out, wondering what it would take to be truly alive; for my life to have meaning. I actually wrote a letter to this effect to the minister I had had in 9<sup>th</sup> grade Confirmation. Along with his first reply, he sent me this book, Instrument of Thy Peace, by Alan Paton, the famous South African author who wrote Cry, the Beloved Country. Instrument of Thy Peace turns out to be a reflection on the Prayer of St. Francis. On the inside cover, Rev. Gilbert signed his name and included a quote from page 26. It reads, “...help me this coming day to do some work of peace for you.”

For me, it was a seed planted. It was the secret code to unraveling the knot of the Great Paradox. To be used as an instrument of peace is to find your life. To be used as an instrument of peace is to find your own soul.

This just happens to be so counter-cultural. Do we not live in a culture that places the highest value on income generated or on victories won or on having the strongest economy or on achieving the highest post doctoral degree or on looking like, as my father used to say, ‘a million bucks’?

The wisdom of our Christian Gospel is that as valuable as all those goals may be, they do not enable us to discover our own souls. They do not produce the abundance of life God intends. It is, rather, in making ourselves available to God as vessels of God’s peace that we truly find our lives.

This is how I have come to understand the Gospel of Jesus Christ.  
I remain in the greatest of hope. Amen.