

Sermon for August 30, 2020
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I always enjoy a text with the disciple Peter. There can be little doubt that Peter really wants to live for God. Peter inspires, providing us with an example of enthusiastic faith. However, Peter is also a tremendous reminder of **our** limited scope of understanding and **our** lack of ability to live as Christ's followers.

Peter is the disciple that, only a few weeks ago in our texts, leapt out of a boat to walk to Jesus on the stormy waves. "If it is you Lord tell me to come to you." Peter says with his mouth and his heart "Tell me to come and I will." But once out of the boat he looks around and realizes "coming to Jesus," in reality, is quite frightening. He becomes overwhelmed, beginning to sink and needs Jesus to bring him back to the safety of the boat.

Peter is also the disciple who responds to Jesus' invite to travel up the mountain, one of only three disciples to join Jesus. At the mountaintop, past prophets appear and Jesus is transfigured, empowered for the work and journey to the cross that lay ahead. At the top of the mountain, enjoying the moment, wanting to please Jesus, Peter offers "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters..." Peter longs to stay with Jesus and dwell in his powerful presence but is swiftly redirected by Jesus back down the mountain where the work of the crowds await.

And last week, it was Peter who, when Jesus asked "Who do you say I am?" declared with confidence "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Peter believes in the Messiah. Yet this week upon discovering what being the Messiah, Son of the Living God, will really look like, Peter recoils "this must never happen..." And Jesus refers to Peter as a stumbling block...

Peter, like all of us, WANTS to follow Jesus but struggles with the reality of what following really means. Following is not an exciting walk across the water, it is a terrifying invitation into the storm. Following Jesus is not dwelling in mountain high moments where we experience God's power, but exhausting, unending work amidst the crowds. Following Jesus is not simply knowing who he is and confessing our faith in the Messiah, the Living God, but rather it is "taking up our cross" and following Jesus...even into death. Peter discovers that following Jesus

rarely looks like what he imagines, rarely aligns with what he wants to do and is almost always hard.

Are we able to hear those truths...

Following Jesus will rarely look like we imagine.

Rarely align with what we want to do

And almost always be hard.

If we have made following Jesus in our image, based on what we want, avoiding the difficult...we have become stumbling blocks to Christ.

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it”.

Follow me... deny yourself.

Oh how we can relate to Peter, my mouth and heart say “Tell me to come and I will” but the reality of following always leaves me standing before Christ “a stumbling block.”

Peter catches a glimpse of Jesus’ vision of the cross. It certainly wasn’t what he imagined, it really wasn’t what he wanted and it was going to be so hard. “God forbid it Lord! This must never happen to you.” Jesus says to Peter “You are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things”.

Oh how we can relate to Peter...our minds set not on divine things but on human things...

This week’s text from Romans is within a section of text that begins “I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

In today’s text we hear: “Your mind is set not on divine things but on human things”.... “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you may discern what is the will of God.”

Paul provides a beautiful image of what not being conformed to this world, what setting your mind on divine things may look like:

Let love be genuine;

hate what is evil,

hold fast to what is good;

love one another with mutual affection;

outdo one another in showing honor.

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Rejoice in hope,

be patient in suffering,

persevere in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints;

extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

Live in harmony with one another;

do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly;

do not claim to be wiser than you are.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.

If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Following Jesus will rarely look like we imagine.

Rarely align with what *we want* to do

And almost always be hard.

In the past few weeks, I have used this Romans text with our Middle School and High School Youth. As they listened, I asked them to consider which of these divine things is the hardest for them to accept and live into. Their answers varied “Bless those that persecute you,” “Be patient in suffering,” “Live in harmony with one another.” I then asked which do you most long for in the world. They responded: “Genuine love,” “Hope,” “Peace.”

We all struggle to live out the will of God, to live into the vision of the divine but at the same time do we not all long for it? Don't you read those verses from Romans and immediately find them becoming your prayer for the whole world? “Oh God – Let our love be genuine, let us hate what is evil, help us hold fast to what is good. May we love one another. May we be hope filled and patient. May we respond to need and offer hospitality to all. May we not persecute and curse but rejoice and weep together. May we be humble and you be wise. May you work peace through us for all creation.”

These verses start “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God.” To not be stumbling blocks to God's vision, we must not ask what we want but rather seek what is the will of God. We must be willing to let God transform, renew our minds.

Jesus said “Follow me...deny yourself, take up your cross.”

As Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised, Peter could only see with his human mind...it did not look like he imagined, it was not what he wanted, it was going to be so hard. The journey there seemed too daunting to get to the third day and the resurrection. I wonder did Peter even hear Jesus explain that part- that on the third day he would be raised? The resurrection to come certainly was not something Peter could have imagined.

Here is my favorite story of Peter. After being a stumbling block, after deserting and denying Jesus before the crucifixion, Jesus does rise on the third day as he told Peter he would. Jesus then comes to Peter on the shore and, calling Peter away from the others, he asks “Peter do you love me?” And Peter says “Yes Lord.” And then Jesus asks again “Peter do you love me?” And Peter says “Yes.”

And then a third time, just as many times as Peter has denied Jesus, he asks again
“Peter do you love me? Then feed my sheep.”

For Jesus loves Peter in spite of his stumbles. Jesus loves Peter enough to cast the
vision again.

Jesus loves us in spite of our stumbles. And Jesus loves us enough to cast the
vision again.

Following Jesus will rarely look like we imagine.

Rarely align with what *we want* to do.

And almost always be hard.

Don't be conformed to this world, set your mind on divine things....“Come follow
me...”