

#40 10-11

Sacrifice for Love

Exodus 3:1-15

Psalm 105:1-6, 23-26, 45c

Romans 12:9-21

Matthew 16:21-28

21From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. 22And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.' 23But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.' 24 Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 25For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. 26For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? 27 'For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. 28Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.'

What *did* Jesus mean when he juxtaposed the two terms "divine things" and "human things"? Because it seems to me that loving and caring and wanting to protect someone we love very much is rather divine! Yet when Paul wants to show Jesus how much he loves him, Jesus accuses him of being Satan! And yet, in some ways, after years of hearing this quote, we've come to accept this as being true - we understand that Jesus was laying out his game plan and Peter was countermanding the quarterback!

The problem is - that regardless of how often we recognize this, we are still not catching ourselves every time that Christ calls us to take up our cross and follow him. Goodness - we as a nation are so focus on self preservation that we find ourselves, time and time again wanting to jump in between Jesus and the Center and take over ourselves.

This struck me particularly last Tuesday. When the day started the big news was that the rebels in Libya had gotten into Gaddafi's compound in Tripoli. We witnessed news reporters risking their lives to report on this civil war zone. But it wasn't long before the news became the tremendous traffic jam as a result of people panicking to get home after a 15 second earthquake which caused very minimal damage. Those two images kept going back and forth through my mind, war zone in Libya, traffic jam long after the danger was over, and I was frighteningly made aware of how spoiled our country really is.

I have the impression that it has become a dominant mentality that we should be able to prevent or take care of everything that life gives us. Then an earthquake and a hurricane come into the equation and we quickly realize how dependent we are. The question is whether or not we can let go and let God so easily or if we carry with us residual guilt or shame for: not knowing what we don't know before we know it; or not being able to stop the inevitable from happening.

How often do we live our lives as though everything depended on us? It is a noble desire to do all we can to further kindness and mercy, but I for one seem to often fall into the area where can get caught up in the mentality of helping and then I go and mess up God's plan. Luckily she always seems to have a recovery plan handy for just such occasions!

"25For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it." Maybe it is just me, but sometimes I catch myself doing until I've reached a dead end and then starts the panic, when I can do no more and see no end - and then - if only to avoid the panic - I calm down and pray . . . and I find that God is there. It is that stopping and looking in the midst of doing that changes the world!

Look at Moses – “When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, ‘Moses, Moses!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’” Nothing would have happened if Moses just kept on working and focusing on his tasks at hand. Moses was aware of his surroundings enough to have a perspective about what God’s priorities may have been. Peter was busy being Jesus’ teacher’s pet – he had lost his perspective.

And what did Moses have to sacrifice – to suffer – to give up – in order to do God’s Will? Here he was – a smart and able heroic figure – had been well fed and educated was in good health – and yet, he was forced to sacrifice one of the most challenging things for any of us to give up. Moses had to sacrifice a “powerless” self image. From a protected life of luxury as the Pharaoh’s grandchild – one that would never have the chance of succeeding into power - he had to give up the self-image of someone who had only himself to live for and his own pleasures.

When asked by the Israelites the name of the God who sent him to them, he was instructed to speak the words, “I AM WHO I AM”. It is a name that connects the greatness of Yahweh and empowers each soul that says those words – because one cannot say, “I AM” without taking some responsibility themselves. And the call is as every call from our compassionate God could be – to care for those who are suffering from injustice. Anyone who is hungry, scared, or abused is experiencing an injustice in God’s eyes. And we who are able are called to take our cross and overcome evil with good. We are called to go to the burning bushes of suffering people and find God – not to walk away, but to face it when we see a call to serve God.

Yahweh – it is an ancient word of empowerment – but it is a very dangerous word. How can anyone say they are part God without running the risk of being deemed crazy or being seen as a challenge to prove otherwise? Claiming the power of God just sets one up for challenges.

And that is when we come to realize that we are not alone. Not only is God long before us where we might tread – but suddenly we see others around us inspired at the same time – and we realize there is a greater truth that is motivating the world. And the only way to reach that goal is to overpower it with goodness and determination.

Our Epistle gave light to his: “Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good . . . Bless those who persecute you . . . do not repay anyone evil for evil . . . never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God . . . if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink . . . this is not the normal everyday behavior that humans spontaneously do – we have to work on this! And yet, when we do we find OFTEN that kindness to those who we may at first see as enemies – turns out to be a miracle – creating a kind person at the other end of our kindness.

Even putting compassion as the goal of God’s coming to earth either in the form of a burning bush or as in our brother and Lord, Jesus Christ to the side, let us think for a moment about the stability of a world when the power is in the hands of a small percentage of the population and they show disregard for those who are the most vulnerable. Each part of life on this planet is important to the rest. Living as a human is an intellectual and emotional process and the world is evolving together - globally. So as no chain is as strong as its weakest link - so is this world dependent on the most vulnerable being secure.

Peter’s reaction to Jesus’ foretelling of pain and suffering was that of fear! Fear of the pain fear of the change in his world view. Peter had a plan made up in his mind about how the world was going to progress following this new leader – and Jesus just totally threw him for a loop. I imagine Moses was also a bit thrown – I mean he had just gotten adjusted to not being an Egyptian and settling nicely into his life as a husband, father and shepherd, when suddenly another huge transition was thrust before him! It seems as though those who follow God should never get too comfortable . . .

But all the time that we are being challenged in our understanding of the world, God and our role as followers of that God, we can trust that at the end of our next metamorphosis – we will rest with God in peace. AMEN