

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

August 31, 2014

Proper 17A/Ordinary 22A/Pentecost +12

The readings this week:

◦ Exodus 3:1-15 ◦ Psalm 26:1-8 ◦

Romans 12:9-21 ◦ Matthew 16:21-28

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

Defining Moment

Just moments before, Peter had responded to Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?" with his great confession that Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus had blessed Peter, called him the "rock" on which the church would be built, and given him the keys of the kingdom. What an affirmation! Just when Peter should have felt the closest to Jesus, however, just when he may have felt the gap between Jesus and him narrow, Jesus rebuked Peter: "Get behind me, Satan!"

Peter often reminds us of our humanity: that's his gift to us. Perhaps it was also a gift to Jesus. Jesus must have been tempted by what Peter said to him. Jesus certainly would have preferred not to have to talk about suffering and death. We honor the humanity of Jesus to say that he was tempted by Peter's words. Perhaps Peter is naming something like fear within Jesus and bringing it to light. It scares Jesus, and he responds forcefully. "Get behind me, Satan!" There is a sting to Peter's words, a challenge that Jesus reacts to. Why wouldn't Jesus be fearful?

Perhaps Jesus and his disciples are at Caesarea Philippi because Jesus is trying to find the courage to continue. Peter's rebuke point to an easier option for Jesus, but Jesus realizes that the way Peter suggests isn't an option. When Jesus articulates this, he knows the way he must follow.

This realization, or "call," along with the power of the Holy Spirit, keeps us from turning our backs on what we value. Following God is difficult. We're always overwhelmed by discipleship, and so turn away or are tempted to turn away. Jesus' call to take up our cross and follow is a vision to keep us on the path. When we hear of those who have died in the "war on terror," or from hunger and preventable diseases like AIDS, we often don't believe our voices and actions can make a difference. But if we stop pursuing justice, peace, healing and wholeness for our lives and for our world, we become supporters of that which we oppose.

We can give up and be silent, or we can keep on

making noise. The moments when we're tempted to give up are when we confront the gap between humans and God and between who Jesus is and who we want Jesus to be.

Discipleship is not about you or me; it's about God, which is what Jesus means by the language of denying ourselves. We are not to forget who we are, but rather to figure out who we are through Jesus and as people carrying the name Christian. Disciples are witnesses, speaking what they see even when they don't feel that anybody is listening or wants to listen. Disciples name evil for what it is; they move beyond thinking that everyone has to understand their authority and what they're saying, and they persevere with the message.

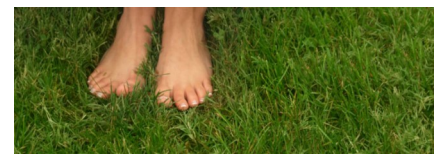
Jesus invites you and me to be disciples, to take him up on the offer of selfless power. It's a risky invitation to accept because it means living in the tension of hearing ourselves make the great confession "Jesus, you're the Messiah!" one minute and hearing Jesus rebuke us with the words, "Get behind me, Satan!" the next. Taking the way of the cross is a real, agonizing process, a task so overwhelming that eventually there is no choice anymore. The only decision is to follow.

The way of the cross is the way of faith -- of claiming life and truth in the face of everything that tells us not to. Once we have seen and heard too much, once Jesus has come too close, then the only thing we can do is to witness to the truth, follow and keep on the path. And this path of the cross is never lived outside of God's love. That's the promise in which we live, and the promise that keeps us on the path.

Deanna Langle,
[Religion Online](#)



Reflecting on the Word



1st Reading: [Exodus 3:1-15](#)

Why would God want to remind Moses of who he is? How have you experienced God beckoning you? Have you ever questioned God? Describe a time when you knew there was something you were called to do by God, but doubted your ability to do it. Ponder the implications of a God who calls himself "I AM." What does that imply about God's existence and attributes? What should our response be? Glance back at verse 11, and Moses' question. Why does it matter less who Moses is and more who God is? [Christ Fellowship](#)

Psalm Reading: [Psalm 26:1-8](#)

Why would David say "I have led a blameless life" in Psalm 26:1 but in Psalm 25:7 & 11, David writes of his "rebellious ways", "sins of his youth", his "great iniquity"? What is David's request of God and what does David expect God to find? Do you request the Lord to do the same and what would He find in your life? Is David being boastful or proud in verses 4-8? Describe a "blameless life." If David believed he lived a blameless life, why would he ask God to redeem him? What is "level ground?" How is it possible and what would it look like for someone to live out Psalm 26? How does Jesus want you to apply this psalm? [City Calvary Chapel](#)

Holy Ground, A Poem

Sometimes life happens about us so fast that we don't stop to contemplate the sacred moments of our daily lives. We fail to recognize that countless encounters throughout the day are dripping of the Divine presence. We forget that our relationships, our homes, our work is holy ground. God is present, are we? Come to the awareness and notice the change in yourself and how you relate to the world around you, your very self, and the people you meet in your day. You may tread more lightly in your relationships, you may treat others with more tenderness and forgiveness, a respect and gratitude may wash over you, as you realize, truly, you are on Holy Ground.

Christi Ortez, [Spokane Faith & Values](#)

Praying Toward Sunday

Holy and loving God, I still marvel that you would subject yourself to the limitation of human flesh and the way of the cross. Please help me to be more willing to follow in the way of the cross and serve others redemptively, even if the price is high. Please give me courage for the journey and a heart more like Jesus so that I can see the eternal stakes in the lives of those I serve just as he did. In the name of my Savior and Sacrifice, Jesus, I pray. Amen.

[Heartlight](#)



3rd Reading: [Romans 12:9-21](#)

What is your experience of sincere love? Is love ever insincere? Define the experience of "evil." Then, answer the question, can Christians ever "hate?" What is the experience of the "good" to which we cling? If I was walking down the street and saw people being devoted to one another in brotherly love, what would I be seeing them do? How can we honor our selves while putting others above us? Identify your experience of a) being joyful in hope, b) patient in affliction, c) faithful in prayer. What does Christian hospitality look like? It is any different from Agnostic hospitality? or Moslem hospitality? Define the difference between "blessing and not cursing those who persecute you." Is this something Christians can afford to do? How can we "Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody?" What can we do to guarantee that we live "at peace with everybody?" [Trinity United Methodist Church](#)

4th Reading: [Matthew 16:21-28](#)

How do you explain the great difference between Peter's insight in verse 16 and his lack of insight in verse 22? Why do you think his response in verse 22 caused Jesus to call him "Satan?" Study verses 24-26 carefully. What do you think Jesus means when he calls on his followers to "deny" themselves? Is this kind of self-denial psychologically healthy? Why? Or why not? Explain verse 25 in your own words, illustrating its truth from examples that you know about. How would this verse directly apply to you? [The Voice](#)