

A 2014 Matthew 16:21-28 Lectionary 22

14-08-31 12th Sunday after Pentecost – also the last Sunday before we switch to Narrative Lect.

God's beloved people, grace and peace to you in the name of our crucified and risen Savior,
Jesus Christ.....Amen.....

[No Matter What...] practice – friends Tangled Blue – God loves you no matter what...

{No matter what....

No matter what may come....

No matter what may come I will not let you go.}

I have had two things running through my mind most of the week in relation to this gospel reading today. I see Peter trying so hard to love and support his Lord and friend Jesus, and Jesus once again turning everything upside down.

Last week Peter was being praised by Jesus. Peter had the answer to the million dollar question, “Who do you say that I am?” “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Strike up the band..., drop the confetti... Peter is the big winner! “On this rock, I will build my church!”

5 short verses later, Peter goes from rock of the church against which the gates of Hades will not prevail... to Satan the occupant of Hell itself. From building block to stumbling block. And the picture that I have had in my mind that I just can't shake is this: [pic of Lucy]

Poor Peter. He's just proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah,... when Jesus starts talking about what's ahead. Jesus outlines his trip to Jerusalem: that he will undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes; that he will be killed; and, that on the third day he will be raised.

So Peter the rock, the one of new found fame, spends all of his credibility in one blow by taking Jesus aside for a little rebuke, “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.” But imagine what he's thinking... The Messiah doesn't die. The Messiah is supposed to come to usher in a new and **powerful** kingdom. And dying is **not** powerful. So Peter speaks up.....

So does Jesus..... first he turns his back to Peter, saying, “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.” Poor Peter... [pic of Charlie brown] Peter was just doing what he does. He had his mind set on human things.

Peter wants to tell Jesus how HE thinks it ought to be. Peter wants a strong Messiah, like the Israelites wanted a King! Those are human things.... The same kinds of things that we can get caught up in. We like to tell Jesus how we think things ought to be..... Do we think that our prayers aren't answered until we see things lining up the way we think they ought to? Do we pray for our enemies or secretly wish them harm? Do we seek to understand people or just wish they would go away? [No matter what..]

On our best days maybe we have a little of Peter-the-Building-Block in us, but Peter-the-Stumbling-Block is close at hand. Because we see things the way we see things... and we are comfortable that way. We don't particularly like to chase after suffering which is why Peter rebukes Jesus. Humans are supposed to want to live and especially Messiahs, not go toward a death that would seem to take away everything that the people wanted the Messiah to do – to give them earthly freedom. We don't know what it is to take up a cross and follow Jesus.

This is why Jesus' Messiah-ship is such a stumbling block to US! For humans, we want to follow Jesus because of the rewards..., the power... but not if it will be at all inconvenient.

Because we know that the world bombards us with challenge and suffering. We want our Messiah to kick the world in the teeth... to stand up and fight....

Anyone who is willing to be in a relationship knows that there will be suffering. Parents hurt with and for their children. Marriages,... friendships,... workplaces,... teams,... clubs,... neighbors,... congregations – in these places and in others we will hurt for them. And we will hurt them. And they will hurt us. All in varying degrees – feelings get hurt..., expectations are dashed..., ideas are squashed..., resentments are harbored..., grudges are carried..., dreams are tarnished.... [No matter what....]

Living in this world will bring us suffering. Our hearts break over the evening news sometimes... But we don't have to like it. We don't have to succumb to the suffering that comes. We will have our hearts broken open. And we will be tempted to fight or hate or cower in self-righteous judgment of others, or yell at God for not taking care of it..... These are not the way of the cross..... and maybe THAT disappoints us a little, too.

But how can Jesus be any more clear about what the kingdom of God is like? Can Jesus be any more clear about how much he loves you? Can he clarify any better that his kingdom is about love? Can we hear it any more plainly than that Jesus loves us and calls us to love others?

So, like Jeremiah being human and a little overwhelmed,
whom would I most like God to strike down?? Pray for and love that one all the more.

Whom would I exclude?? Jesus loves that one, too.

Whom would I like to see Jesus come in all his glory to repay??

See these are “might-and-power-Messiah” kinds of dreams that we foist on Jesus,.... when all he sees is the stumbling block and calls out “Satan.” Loving builds and breaks and rebuilds hearts; judging only hardens and tears down hearts.

I think the hardest word for us to hear is that Jesus does not side with worldly power or our suggestions to grab it. Instead, over and over and over....Jesus reverses our expectations. Beginning with Satan trying and failing to tempt Jesus in the wilderness with power and authority. Over and over, Jesus moves in the way of love, and loving those whom the world would throw aside. [No Matter What...]

Blessed are:

The poor in spirit... Those who mourn...

The meek... Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...

The merciful... The pure in heart... The peacemakers...

Those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake...

Jesus touched and healed a leper...

He healed the Centurion's servant – from a distance...

Forgave the sins of the paralytic, and THEN healed him – so sins and sickness aren't causally linked after all!!

Called the tax collector Matthew to be a disciple...

Ate with tax collectors and sinners... Debated with the religious authorities...

Healed the blind men... Healed on the Sabbath...

Told us that the Kingdom is full of good seed and bad seed, and it isn't ours to judge and make the call... he fed 5000 men, plus women and children...

Walked on the water... Spoke with a Canaanite woman....

AND praised and re-educated Peter the building block and the satan stumbling block....

And Jesus loves you. No matter what....

And all these people were like [snoopy and Charlie dance] [No Matter What...]

Jesus came in his glory when he was transfigured and when he was raised from the dead and when he ascended into heaven, and some of those around him were still alive. They hadn't tasted death before he was killed and raised. And Jesus DID repay everyone...just as he said he would.... But not as the might-and-power-Messiah with judgment that we deserve,.... but as the broken-hearted, loving-hearted, cross-bearing, suffering-accompanying, kingdom-bringing-every-time-his-people-love-their-neighbor.... Savior.... that he promises to be.
Amen.....