

“Following Jesus When the Glass is Half Full”

August 30th, 2020 Covid 24
Matthew 16: 21-26

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Proverbs 3:5-6 (NRSV) Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

Matthew 16:21-28 (The Message) Then Jesus made it clear to his disciples that it was now necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, submit to an ordeal of suffering at the hands of the religious leaders, be killed, and then on the third day be raised up alive. Peter took him in hand, protesting, “Impossible, Master! That can never be!” But Jesus didn’t swerve. “Peter, get out of my way. Satan, get lost. You have no idea how God works.” Then Jesus went to work on his disciples. “Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You’re not in the driver’s seat; I am. Don’t run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I’ll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to finding yourself, your true self. What kind of deal is it to get everything you want but lose yourself? What could you ever trade your soul for?”

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Last week we had the story of the Confession of Simon Peter, who has a glimpse of who Jesus really is. And he has the gumption — the audacity — to blurt it out: “*You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!*” I described it as a ‘mic drop’ moment. Jesus tells him he is blessed for having received this revelation from heaven, and then changes his name to Peter and tells him he will build the church on this rock, on this confession, on this man.

This week’s scripture comes right after this confession and this statement of building the church on Peter. Immediately after giving Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven, Jesus says to him “*Get behind me Satan!*” I can’t help but think of the Proverb that says: “Pride goes before the fall.”

One moment Jesus is saying to Peter “That’s it! You got it! You get this!” and the next moment Jesus says to him “You so totally don’t get it at all!” One moment he’s on Boardwalk and king of the world, and the next he’s picked up the card that says: “Go directly to jail, do not pass Go, do not collect \$200.”

First off, I want to say how awesome it is that the church is built on Peter. Because Peter knows how to mess things up and make a production of it. He doesn’t just mess up quietly and sort of sweep his mistakes under the rug when no one is looking. No way! Peter is the kind of guy to say ‘Watch me!’ and then proceed to fall flat on his face. He’s the guy that jumps out of the boat and then starts to sink. And, he’s the guy who lied about knowing Jesus three times when his friend and Lord needed him most.

Peter is a sinner and a saint. And if Peter gets the keys to heaven, well that means there is room for me and for you. Thank God for Peter and for all the other misfits who followed and still follow Jesus! They remind us that there is truly room for all in the kingdom of heaven.

But why the flip? Why did Jesus go from praising Peter and giving him heaven to almost calling him Satan?

The flip was the beginning part of the scripture: “*From 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. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.”* (Matt.16:21-22 NRSV)

When Peter heard Jesus tell them the next part of the plan was to walk headlong towards suffering, Peter reacted with a “No way, Jesus!” Peter with his shiny gold star of being a model disciple was empowered to tell Jesus that *this was not the power of positive thinking* and that Jesus could do better. He wanted Jesus to turn that frown upside down and think happy future thoughts.

Don’t optimistic people drive you crazy sometimes? You’re worried about something or grumpy about something and they are all sunshine and Christmas lights. These days there doesn’t seem to be much to be optimistic about, and lots to be pessimistic about. This week some kids are returning to school and some teachers are too. I tell you there’s a whole lot of worry there and we need to pray for teachers and the principals, custodians and all the support staff.

I’ve been a bit anxious about the shift we are making at the church as we move to re-gathering for worship, but our shift is nothing like the shift

that our educators are making. So please do pray for them. That is but one giant worry — just read the newspaper feed on line about the U.S. election, the ongoing insidious systemic racism, hurricanes — and there is so much more to be worried and pessimistic about.

Here's the thing. Becoming a Christian is very likely to give you more joy. Deepening your faith is very likely to give you more peace and more patience and healing for pain. However — and this is likely good news to some of you—Christianity is not about converting from a pessimist to an optimist. The pessimists out there are saying 'Thank God, that would be awful!! (Oh the temptation to name some of my favourite pessimists ... there are so many of you!)

Bad news if you self-identify as a pessimist: becoming a Christian is not about being a pessimist either. Becoming a Christian is not about becoming an optimist or a pessimist. It is about... are you ready? — Following Jesus. Full stop. That's it.

But what if I don't like where Jesus goes? Peter didn't. And in that moment Peter had a choice to go his own way or to go Jesus' way. Here's the secret: sometimes Jesus will lead you to lovely places, beside still waters and to green pastures where you can lie down and rest your weary mind, body and soul. But sometimes he will lead you to and through the valley of the shadow of death. No one wants to go there.

The optimist says "Don't worry, we can stay all day in the green pastures. Don't even mention dark valleys because we will find another way with a can-do attitude." The pessimist says "It's dark valleys for me alright, I never win anything, this is the worst year ever so of course it will be dark valleys. Might as well put a sign up on the way in that reads "Kim's Valley" and pitch a tent in the middle!

But when you follow Jesus, you are called to lay down your optimism and your pessimism and just follow - - trusting that you are not alone and that God will bring good out of the darkest valleys. I don't know if there is a reason for all of our dark valleys. I suspect there isn't; but I do know that God will bring you through it and bring something good out of it.

I shared on Sunday night that my prayer lately has been "I don't know". Whenever I have a major or minor worry or fear or situation where I don't know what to do or how to fix it, I have started as a prayer saying "I don't know". I picture laying the worry at the foot of the cross and leaving it for Jesus. Because here's the thing: **he does know**. Jesus knows the way through. We are not called to be God and to fix everything that is so

beyond our control. So we surrender our will. We surrender our brilliant and wonderful ideas along with our grumpy nature and fearful conspiracy theories for the future, and we follow. *You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.*”

But if we just surrender, who is going to do something about all the problems in the world? Here’s the secret. Jesus leads us out into the world. Jesus leads us to specific people and situations and issues to make a difference. So let us go from this place prepared to pray: *I don’t know; but you do.* Let us go from this place laying down our optimism and our pessimism to follow Jesus.

Thanks be to God.