

13th Sunday After Pentecost (A) 8/30/20 youtube link:

TEXT: Matthew 16:201-28

* * * * *

LAST week we saw Jesus on his first and only trip OUTSIDE of Palestine.
...and it was a CRITICAL moment in his life and ministry.

He was NEARING the END of his ministry.

Did his DISCIPLES understand WHO he WAS?

Were all his efforts over the last 3 years FRUITFUL?
...or had it all been in VAIN?

This was a CRITICAL moment.

And critical MOMENTS...call for critical DECISIONS.

Jesus ASKED his disciples 2 critical QUESTIONS:

- 1.) *"Who do people say that I am?"* ...and they told him.
- 2.) *"Who do YOU say that I am?"* ...and most of them did not say anything!

But Peter BOLDLY declared:

"You are the MESSIAH...the Son of the Living God."

And at THAT point...Jesus gave him a new name.

"You are no longer CEPHAS," ...Jesus said.

"You are PETROS...the ROCK.

And UPON this rock I will build my church."

(pause)

Well...right AFTER that...THIS week... we see Jesus
REVEALING the ultimate PURPOSE of his ministry.

And his words prove HARD to ACCEPT

--EVEN for a disciple whom Jesus has called a *"Rock"*.

(pause)

G-1) Jesus CHANGED the MOOD of the conversation.
He changed the FOCUS.

He began to tell them

...that the crowds would soon turn AGAINST him

...that he would be CRUCIFIED and DIE

...and that on the 3rd day...he would be RAISED from the dead.

WHOA!

That's not FUN!...NOT fun at ALL!

Jesus changed the mood of the conversation too QUICKLY.

ONE moment they were GRINNING and ENJOYING the moment
when friends reach a new level of insight, commitment, and trust.

The NEXT Jesus was talking about DEATH and DYING..

It was an ABRUPT change

...and his disciples did NOT know what to MAKE of it!

Rev. WAYNE BROUWER observes:

“PETER wanted to BASK in his ‘CELEBRITY status’ for a while.

*After all...he had managed to give the RIGHT ANSWER
to the TOUGHEST...most EMBARRASSING challenge
that Jesus could have thrown at them.*

*It was like winning an Oscar and a Grammy... all at once
--and Peter wanted to spend more time at the podium
receiving the accolades of both Jesus and the others.”*

BROWER says:

*“But Jesus steps up to the microphone
and starts recording his martyr's testimony.*

He is going to Jerusalem...he says.

He knows his ENEMIES are WAITING for him there.

*He is certain they will ARREST him ...and BEAT him...
... and make him SUFFER.*

*And he is confident that the OUTCOME of their actions
will result in his DEATH.”*

Nope...NOT good!
DEFINITELY not good!

G-2) PETER began to REBUKE Jesus.

He took Jesus ASIDE and said:

*“God FORBID it, Lord!
This must NEVER happen to you!”*

Can't say that I BLAME Peter.

I mean...if **I** had been there with Jesus
...and gotten as CLOSE to him as PETER did...
--I'll GUARANTEE you
...**I** would NOT have wanted Jesus to go through that!
...**I** probably would have tried to STOP him, too!

NOBODY would want ANYONE they loved
...to be HUMILIATED and TORTURED
...to SUFFER and be KILLED!

So...NO...I can't fault Peter for THAT!

G-3) But in RESPONSE...JESUS rebuked PETER!

Jesus' WORDS to Peter were as HARSH
as ANY words in the New Testament!

*“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.”*

Those ARE strong words!

They probably BURNED in Peter's BRAIN when he HEARD them!

WHY would Jesus call
one of his most TRUSTED and BELOVED followers... "*SATAN*"?

Well...there was likely a LOT going ON in Jesus' MIND at that moment.

a.] There was **TEMPTATION**.

Likely Jesus REMEMBERED times when he had been tempted BEFORE.

And getting OUT of that PLAN which God had for him
...with all of the humiliation...torture...suffering...and death...
--certainly WOULD have been **TEMPTING!**

Jesus MAY have been TEMPTED to back OUT of it.

And I couldn't FAULT Jesus for that!
He was HUMAN...after ALL!

b.] MAYBE Peter wanted Jesus to BE
...the Messiah...the Christ...the Savior...
--but to **DO it the EASY way!**

Maybe Jesus could be SUCCESSFUL and VICTORIOUS in his mission
--WITHOUT being humiliated and tortured!
--WITHOUT suffering and being killed!

Well...Peter MAY be the "*Rock*"
upon which Jesus would BUILD his CHURCH

But when Jesus revealed the SUFFERING that would come FIRST
...Peter became a "*Tempter*" and a "*Stumbling Block*".

And he STOOD in Jesus' way...LITERALLY!
G-4) But Jesus didn't BUDGE...he KEPT his RESOLVE.

If there is any DOUBT that he was RESISTING the TEMPTATION
to QUIT...back OUT...or DO things the EASY way
--just LISTEN to what he told Peter NEXT.

*“If any want to become MY followers
let them DENY themselves...take up their CROSS...
...and FOLLOW me.”*

From JESUS’ perspective...the path to personal SUCCESS in life...
...IS that of self-DENIAL.

From HIS perspective...for HIM...
...self-denial was ESSENTIAL for the SALVATION of the WORLD!

And he expected his FOLLOWERS...to FOLLOW that path WITH him!
(pause)

Now...HOW does this APPLY to US?

**I.) Like Peter...WE acknowledge Jesus as our Lord!
...and we love being WITH him!**

We LOVE going to CHURCH.
...ESPECIALLY when we get our building OPEN again!

It’s been so LONG since we could DO that!

We’d LOVE to
--just STAY there WITH him and ENJOY it!
--and AVOID the DIFFICULTIES of ministry
out there in the WORLD!

We’re TEMPTED to DO that!

But LIFE...and FOLLOWING Jesus...don’t WORK that way!
(pause)

Rabbi HAROLD KUSHNER remembered a scene
from a television program that he saw years ago.

He said it showed a young man and a young woman
leaning together against the railing of a ship at sea.

The winds tousled at their hair.
The sprays showered them now and again.

But they didn't notice any of it,
because their eyes were glued on each other.

The world disappeared around them as they murmured their love.

*"If I should die tomorrow," he said softly to her,
"I'd have lived an eternity in your love."*

She nodded her head in bashful intimacy and leaned over to kiss him.

Their lips lingered ...and they became one as the bustle around them faded.

Finally, they slipped away, arm in arm in the waltz of passionate lovers.

Behind them...in the void left as they shuffled their slow 2-step to the left...
--the camera caught a life preserver hanging on the galley wall.

It carried the name of the ship: *Titanic*.
(pause)

Rev. WAYNE BROUWER says:
*"That is often the way WE want it
...in our books and movies and television programs.*

*We want to linger in the critical moment.
We want to feel the emotional high of the kiss in slow motion.*

*We want to sit in the experience of the warm fuzzies
and then go get a burger.*

But Jesus says, "No."

*Jesus says that life is NOT found in the MOMENT
--not even if it is a moment of INSIGHT or LOVE or PASSION.*

Life is a JOURNEY...NOT a DESTINATION!"

Brouwer STATES:

"That means traditions ALONE...cannot keep our faith strong.

*It means that life and society and the church
will ALWAYS be CHANGING.*

It can be FRIGHTENING to us."

And Brouwer CHALLENGES:

*"Why can't we just stay in the little huddle
... feeling good about ourselves?*

Why do we HAVE to HIT the ROAD with Jesus?"
(pause)

Well...like PETER...WE acknowledge Jesus as our Lord!

And we'd LOVE to
--just STAY in church WITH him and ENJOY it!
--and AVOID the DIFFICULTIES of ministry in the WORLD.

But we CAN'T ...and we DON'T.

Why NOT?

Because it is JESUS who CALLS us to FOLLOW him!

(pause)

II.) Our Lord's CALL is for a LIFE of CROSS-bearing.

A.] It's NOT the "*Easy Way*".

The Christian life involves a COUNTER-cultural lifestyle.

Ours is ONE that goes AGAINST the GRAIN of our EXPECTATIONS
about what a LIFE of FAITH in Christ
SHOULD be like.

But such a way of life ...of self-DENIAL...self-SACRIFICE...
--is what JESUS lived
--and is what he expects his FOLLOWERS to live.

It's NOT the "*EASY*" way.
And that's OK.

I like the story of the young man...eager to make it to the top...
who went to a well-known millionaire businessman
and asked him the 1st REASON for his SUCCESS.

The businessman answered without hesitation, "*Hard work.*"

After a lengthy pause...the young man asked,
"*What is the SECOND reason?*"

There is for ALL of us...if we'll ADMIT it
--the LURE of the "*Easy Way*".

Jesus' DISCIPLES were not IMMUNE to it.

And NEITHER are WE!

But it's NOT the way we're CALLED to!
(pause)

B.} There is something more, as well.

Jesus tells us that LIFE is a PILGRIMAGE...not a TOUR.

You know what a **TOUR** is, don't you?

It's where you let someone else do all the planning.

- * They take care of your luggage.
- * They put you on a big, air-conditioned bus
and ferry you around to all the right sights.
- * They pay the entrance fees for your tickets
so you don't have to stand in the heat or the sun by the booth.
- * You can stay safe and comfortable and dry,
while others do the sweating for you.

That's a TOUR.

HOWEVER...a **PILGRIMAGE**...is NOT like THAT!

From WAYNE BROWER...again:

*"A true pilgrimage is always PERSONAL...always FIRSTHAND
...always SOMETHING you HAVE to DO...YOURSELF!"*

THAT is what Jesus says to his disciples.

With Peter ...THEY want Jesus

to WATCH God's plans work themselves out... from a safe distance!

They wish for JESUS

-- to REST with THEM on the sidelines,

--to take the tour on the big 'LOVE BOAT'

...instead of swimming with sharks. ☺

But Jesus says, "No."

Life is a personal journey.

* *Jesus cannot avoid it.*

* *He cannot have someone else stand in for him.*

* *He has to make the pilgrimage himself.”*

How TRUE!

And the SAME is TRUE for US!

NOBODY else can LIVE our life FOR us!

NOBODLY else can MAKE our PILGRIMAGE for us!

But...LISTEN to how Brower CONCLUDES this thought:

“Life is a pilgrimage...Jesus tells us...not a tour.

It is lived in the footsteps of the Master.

It is carried out in the mission of the church.

Here is the road no one wants to travel.

Yet, if you choose NOT to walk it...you will never FIND YOURSELF.”

** Which MEANS...if you REALLY want to FIND yourself

--FIND yourself following JESUS!



(pause)

III.) FINALLY...we see that OUR place is behind JESUS!

One of the early church fathers..., a man named Origen...

suggested that when Jesus said to Peter, "*Get behind me, Satan*"

--what he actually meant was:

"Peter, your place is BEHIND me, NOT in FRONT of me.

It's YOUR job to FOLLOW me in the way I choose,

...NOT to try to LEAD me in the way YOU would like me to go."

Rev. JOHNNY DEAN translates this to say:

"Deny yourself...take up your cross...and follow me,

Get on this new thrill ride with me.

There will be many dangerous twists and turns in the tracks,

--but I promise you it will never be dull.

It will mean putting someone other than yourself first,

being concerned not so much with what YOU want,

...but what God wants for you.

It won't be easy

and sometimes it won't be much fun.

But it will never be boring."

It's human nature...ISN'T it!

* WE want to be "out in front".

* It's all about ME!

* I'm gonna do it MY way!

But our place...is BEHIND...JESUS!

And...AGAIN...if you REALLY want to FIND yourself

--FIND yourself following JESUS!



(PAUSE)

Rev. LEONARD SWEET closes us out with THIS story
about a CHURCH who wanted to IMPROVE their worship attendance.

So they hired a powerful ADVERTISING agency
to come in...study their situation...and make recommendations.

The agency DID their RESEARCH
and then SUGGESTED that the church
get RID of all the CROSSES in the church
--because the CROSSES might send a NEGATIVE message
to prospective young worshippers! ☹

Sweet SAYS:

*“Now, I'm sure that in its history,
that advertising agency has come up with some brilliant ideas.*

But, in my opinion, that was not one of them!

*We can't get rid of the cross!
We don't want to get rid of the cross.*

*The cross is the dramatic symbol
of our faith...hope...love...and forgiveness.*

*The cross is the powerful reminder
of God's sacrificial and redemptive love for us.*

*And the cross is the constant signal to us
of how God wants us to live and love today
--as sacrificial servants.”*

Sweet STATES:

*“We are NOT called to be PRIMA DONNAS.
We are called to be SERVANTS.*

*We are called to take up the MISSION of Christ
... and to EMULATE the servant SPIRIT of our LORD.”*
(PAUSE)

Well...this morning...I would say:

“Lift high the cross!

The love of God proclaim!

Till all the world adore his sacred name!”

So lead on, Lord Jesus!

We’re following!



T.B.T.G.

AMEN!