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St. Mary's Episcopal Church

September 13, 2015 (XVI Pentecost)

Proverbs 1:20-33

Psalm 19

James 3:1-12

Mark 8:27-38

Collect

O God, because without you we are not able to please you, mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Introduction

Being caught up short or not knowing or understanding what is happening is a position very few, if any, relish being in. It is difficult because we like being able to fall back on the practices and processes that have worked for us in the past. We like the comfort of the status-quo.

This past week we remembered the events of 9/11 fourteen years ago. On that day nearly 3,000 people along with nearly 500 firefighters and police officers were killed. Beyond these numbers was the incredible grief, confusion that was felt by so many people. It felt almost impossible to wrap our minds around the events of that day. Devastating as well is an event remembered from 4 years ago. On February 22, 2011 a 6.3 earthquake hit Christchurch, New Zealand killing nearly 200 people. Both of these days were, for those touched by them, times where a normal life filled with the status quo was violently ripped away.

A violent change in one's understanding of life leaves such a paralyzing feeling and yet, creative new life, as we have seen, has sprung up and flourished.

Body

Jesus, in our gospel lesson from the eighth chapter of Mark, seems to ask his followers a simple enough question. In verse twenty-seven, he asks, **“Who do people say that I am?”** They replied, “some say John the Baptist or Elijah or one of the prophets.” It seems simple enough and the disciples, oh so wanted to have the right answer—much like us today. Peter answers, **“You are the Messiah.”** Jesus then instructs them not to tell anyone. What is going on? If Peter knew the right answer then why does Jesus want them to remain quiet?

Jesus’ teaching on what the Messiah will do and who the Messiah is leads Peter to rebuke him. This brings the well-known but perhaps difficult to understand statement from Jesus, **“Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”** Peter’s rebuke of Jesus reveals a struggle to grasp and live with the Messiah Jesus reveals himself to be. Everything Peter had up to this moment; the same answers, the same way of doing things—all that brings a sense of comfort—is no longer going to be of help.

Jesus then begins making several statements that appear to be full of paradoxes. If someone wants to be Jesus’ disciple they must deny themselves and take up a cross. If one wants to save their life they must be willing to lose it. By losing our lives for the sake of the gospel is the only way to save it.

We are so much like Peter and the disciples. We don’t like confusion and we struggle with pain and discomfort. The difficulty the disciples, and we have, is that the message of the gospel is that before resurrection there is death. Before an empty tomb there is a cross. Before Easter Day there is Good Friday.

All of this is not to say we should court difficulty or pain or discomfort for its own sake. We cannot say that any problem we are

responsible for is the same as our cross. However, it does mean that the work of faithful discernment is not easy. Walking in faithfulness and being transformed by God is not quick and painless. The miracle of the gospel, though, is if we are willing to lose ourselves for Christ's sake we will find life.

Closing

2001 in the United States and 2011 in New Zealand are years remembered for incredible trauma. What was comfortable was taken away. The familiar answers were no longer sufficient. One way of living ended but in the pain the seeds of possible new life were sown. There is risk in saying yes to Jesus. We risk the unknown. We risk living into some pain and discomfort. We risk letting go of what is comfortable. However, we also risk that in letting go we find ourselves in Christ. In stepping into the unknown we find Christ to be a sufficient guide. In a small spark of courageous creativity new life can be seen. In picking up our cross and following Jesus we find and participate in the power of the resurrection! Amen.