

"...OUR POOR HEART, WITH ALL ITS RAGGED EDGES..."

Scandalous God, you suffer our will to power, the narrowness of our faith: lead us on the path of loss where empires tremble and terror yields to wisdom's cry and the open hands of love; through Jesus Christ, the crucified Lord. Amen.

from *Prayers for an Inclusive Church*, Steven Shakespeare

SEPTEMBER 12, 2021

THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JAMES 3:1-12, PSALM 116:1-8, MARK 8:27-38 (PROPER 19B)

ST. MARK'S-IN-THE-VALLEY

EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND PRESCHOOL

Los Olivos, California

THE REV. RANDALL C.K. DAY, D.MIN., PRIEST AND RECTOR

MAY I SPEAK AND MAY WE HEAR FROM THE HEART OF THE LIVING GOD
WHO IS CREATING, REDEEMING, AND SANCTIFYING US.

Jesus offers his disciples a quiz as they travel in dangerous territory, these Jews from the margins moving into the Roman enclave of Caesarea Philippi.

How would you or do you answer the questions Jesus asks: "Who do people say that I am?" and "Who do you say that I am?"

After listening to their responses, Jesus "sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him."

Which is not an insignificant turn in this story.

This is not Jesus being humble in response to the disciples' grand ideas of who Jesus is.

This is Jesus saying they

failed the exam.

Don't tell anyone who I am because *you don't know who I am*.

But then he goes on to give them the answer to his question and it doesn't sit well with Peter – whether or not he could fully hear and understand what Jesus was saying.

Peter and the disciples had grand ideas for Jesus, they wanted him to be who they thought they wanted, who they thought they needed – or, at the least, someone familiar – that they had seen before ("another one of these types").

Peter, especially in the face of occupation and subjugation by the Roman Empire, wanted a Messiah liberator, to rise up and over power

the persecutors.

When Jesus speaks of his actual identity, Peter sees his hopes being dashed and he lets Jesus know his strong disapproval, only to get a put-down in return.

No, Jesus was not the crusader, nor was he a rerun of any religious figure they had seen before.

James Finley, one of my teachers, a former Trappist monk, psychologist, spiritual director and author speaks of the identity of Jesus and what Jesus reveals of God in the world.

He says: "Another dimension of the mystery of the mind of Christ is, as we sit in meditation or sit in prayer, or live our life, we become painfully aware of how limited we are, we become painfully aware of how unfaithful we are, we become painfully aware of all our faltering ways. And yet, in this very realization, we discover an unexpected oneness with God in our brokenness.

"In fact, this is the very essence of Christian faith, the very essence of the good news that God makes our very brokenness to be the place of ineffable encounter and oneness with Godself."

"This is the extraordinary mystery, that our poor heart, with all its ragged edges, is, in its very poverty, the place God's presence is perfectly manifested in the world."

When Jesus says that he must "undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed" he is showing that God is not primarily present in the world in showing force nor in being superior, but meets humanity in all the ways we suffer and die.

Here is the reconnection of all of humanity with all of God – in our vulnerability, in our failure, in our losses.

Thus: the cross is unavoidably at the center of our life – because the life of Christ, God's life, is always real, authentic, whole and one – nothing and no one left out.

James Finley reminds us: "Jesus says what you do to these the least of my brethren you do to me. That is, Jesus proclaims that there is no difference between all that he really is and all of what the broken, and the poor, and the misguided essentially are."

In calling us to take up our cross, Jesus invites us into the same identity that he has: one with all who are losing their lives in this world (one with us when we are losing our lives in this world), finding that God is with them (with us) in ways they (we) may have hoped but are still and continually surprised to discover to be real.

There are many expressions of this reality of God's life in the

world. It is the hunger Jesus experienced, recognizing the hunger we all experience, that leads us to care and to *act* to feed others, as one example. It is the rejection that Jesus experienced, connected to the isolation that we experience, that leads us to offer ourselves to welcome others and to create a place of hospitality. It is the mocking and scorn Jesus experienced that connects to all the ways in which unbridled tongues damage and destroy human lives, as James makes clear, that draws us to awaken to and care for how we speak to one other wherever we are – especially in this era in which speech is more poisonous and deceiving than ever.

While Peter's idea of vanquishing the Romans may have

seemed a grander plan than the life Jesus was living, Jesus was revealing God's presence with and in the whole world for a larger reconciliation and healing in love.

May we release our own willful ideas of who we think we want or need God to be and more and more awaken to who Christ is in us, with us and with all people in all times and places and circumstances and in the action we take, the things we do. In our “wayward ways,” (as James Finley says), may we more and more discover that to live our real lives, with our ragged edges, and with and as the least, lost and leftout ***is*** Christ's life *living* as our lives, as the lives of those (all those) with whom we live.



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