

Proper 17, Year A
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There have been moments in my life when I have wanted to shrink back from what I have felt called to do or say. Usually it is because someone or something has thrown up a challenge or an obstacle that seems insurmountable or just too scary to face. I think that may be what was happening to Simon Peter in this morning's Gospel lesson.

In my mind's eye I see Peter up-close to Jesus, standing in front of him, blocking his way, maybe even holding him by the shoulders. Seeing Peter that way I realize he is literally looking the wrong way – The opposite direction from where Jesus is looking. Jesus response is strong "Get behind me Satan". By using the term Satan he is naming Peter's collusion with that which would thwart the plans and purposes of God. Now there are several ways to understand the Greek for "Get behind me..." It can be understood as "get out of my sight", but it can also be understood as "get in line behind me". What Jesus wants, and will be forceful about pursuing, is to get Peter and anyone else who resists the heart of God's call to him, to drop the resistance and to fall in behind so they can see what He is seeing – His divine destination.

And in the Gospel, the geographical position of that destination is Jerusalem. Jerusalem was a place where all sorts of tensions were present and gaining steam. There would be a show down one way or another between the power of Rome and the powers in the Hebrew Temple. Peter is suggesting that Jesus stay out of it. Peter begs him to be reasonable and avoid the danger he doesn't have to get caught up in.

After his strong words Jesus says to him, "*you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.*" In this context it seems that '*human things*' are focused on self-preservation and keeping out of the way, while '*divine things*' are about choosing to engage - taking the first, second and third step of involvement. Engaging in the difficult places with the costly, transformative love of God.

Jesus goes on to describe the paradoxical truth of our way of life and faith – that it is in choosing to engage when it is risky or costly that we are following him. We do not shy from engaging in the mounting tensions and the difficult situations. Rather, the vision and understanding of divine things leads us to engage in a different way of being - the way of love, that can break the cycles of tension and threat.

I started out by saying that I have had times in my life when I have wanted to shrink back from what I feel called to, because of some obstacle or opposition. What I have found, and I know many of you have found it to, is that those obstacles that make me want to shrink back do not stand up to my forward movement, when I have discerned that movement is in God's direction. But making that forward movement takes gumption, and though practice lessens the fear, it never takes it away completely.

At the close of this passage Jesus says there are some there who will not die before they see him coming in his kingdom. I am beginning to think those words were not just for those he was with then, but also for those he is with now. Ever since hearing bishop Bud preach at the Ascension Day service in West Newbury, I have been becoming more convinced that the second coming is already here. In theological terms that is realized eschatology. In that sermon, Bishop Bud suggested that it is in the engagement with God's call to service and ministry that we find Christ and his kingdom already fully among us.

When we engage by letting go of our need to control and our fear about what has happened to us, or what might happen to us, we can be in the moment, present now. Then we know a deeper layer of life - of Christ with us, moving in the people, and circumstances of our lives. Then we are present with Moses,

turning aside at the sight of something impossible. And in those moments, bushes burn, I AM speaks, and our perception is transformed, deepened to a place where the divine overtakes the human.

Then even if what we fear occurs, we are not bereft. Indeed we find ourselves over and over losing the life we were clinging to, only to find the expanded and endless life of God's love for us.

A colleague shared some words this week that I want to end with:

"We are called to see it again, in our own places, in our own time - to see and to believe - that if we take the courage to give our lives away for Jesus' sake, we will find true life - right here and now in the Kingdom amongst us."

-Throck in Aus, on www.desperatepreacher.com

In Christ's name. Amen+