

Proper 24 (18 Pentecost year B) 2021
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC
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October 17, 2021

Job 38:1-7 Psalm 104:1-9, 25, 37c Hebrews 5:1-10 Mark 10:35-45

“[Jesus] took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him,³³ saying, ‘See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles;³⁴ they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again.’”

Immediately after these words, James and John approach Jesus. The brothers are anticipating a triumphant military entry into Jerusalem. They want to go with Jesus “in glory,” in military splendor. At the victory banquet, they will sit on either side of Jesus, in the seats of honor. Did they not hear what Jesus just said? In fact, this is Jesus’ third foretelling of his crucifixion and resurrection. The disciples still do not know what is going on. Jesus and his followers do not enter Jerusalem in a show of military power. There are two people at Jesus’ side, one to the left and one to the right, when Jesus enters into glory. They are criminals from the insurrection. Jesus enters into glory from the cross. Jesus’ march to Jerusalem is not about winning in the ways of the world, the ways of war, of power. We have no clue what is going on.

How can we understand words like this:

“Whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; whoever loses his life ... shall save it (8:35).” “If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all (9:35)... .” “Whoever wishes to become great ... shall be your servant” and “Whoever wishes to be first ... shall be slave of all.”

Isn’t life about winning? Striving to be first? Not in a life with Jesus. Loving our neighbor as ourselves completely upends a way of life we might have been living. The disciples’ lives already have been changed dramatically. They left fishing boats, businesses, charts of accounts, and more. Jesus’ compelling words, “Come. Follow me” are life changing, over and over again. We are walking with Jesus. And. We still want our lives to be shaped in “our” way, in forms and patterns that we recognize. Life with Jesus is not like that, sometimes not “our way” at all.

Consider today, right now. We are on the verge, and in a way, in the middle of, a new time in and for the church. Our parishioners attend in person and virtually; our connections with the world extend far beyond our physical reach. I struggle to understand faith connections that remain only virtual. This is not a body of Christ with which I am familiar, and yet here it is – comments and co-prayerers of The Daily Office join me each week in my office. Some I know, others I do not. I had considered stopping that prayer service; there are Sundays when attendance is me and one other person. In a “ways of the world” dynamic this service is not a success. It is not “worth my time.” And yet, I am compelled to continue saying the Office on Sunday mornings. I have the privilege of joining with saints known and unknown, people close and far away to read scripture, to shape each day with morning prayer. Each week, people watch the service at a later time; what looks like a “losing” service in numbers consistently reaches people after Sunday morning. Praying, I believe, is never something to be won, something about which to wage war or parade through a city. I still fall into the trap of “the ways of the world.” I

occasionally get tangled up in worldly concerns: where is everyone? We need young people ... strong people ... families. What can we DO?

Like the disciples, we have no idea what is going on. Living, walking with Jesus not only changes our lives but transforms them. Sometimes we do not really want transformation; maybe that's just me. A transformed life acknowledges that praying the Daily Office changes me, gives me time in a particular form of -worship. The prayers are relevant, timely through every century, life-changing. In one prayer, every day, we are reminded to be grateful. "We thank you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life. But above all, for your inestimable love ... in Jesus.

Friends, what we need is not more people or more families, but more hope, more joy, more connection ... more Jesus. We seek a way of being, not just doing. We are to live in a way that honors and glorifies God; being active in a faith community is one piece of that way of living. You could be at home this morning, but you are here, honoring God, giving thanks, offering yourselves to ... what? To a life that does not reflect the values of a world that shouts "win, win, win." To those joining us from home and hospitals and other places: welcome. I'm so glad you are here. On Facebook or YouTube, please say "hello." Join Redeemer in our walk of faith. You belong here; come on in.

Come in to a life that remembers that this is God's church, and that God is in control. We believe in the God of creation, the one who laid the earth's cornerstone, the creator of morning stars that sing and companion of heavenly beings that shout for joy." It is to this life that we are invited: a life of hope, of joy in God's creation, a life that discovers that grandness of God, that sees Jesus in every other person. This is a life to offer others; bring friends to God's church, right here. Share with others your way of life, your hope, your walk.

Walking with Jesus means being active in faith, getting to know Jesus in scripture and prayer, and in life practices of service to others. We empty ourselves (of ego, power, coming out "on top") in order to make room for God as a way of life. Self emptying is uncomfortable, strangely freeing, then life-changing. We receive far more than we give. We take this walk with Jesus, free to take risks in his name. Jesus is with us. Time and again Jesus will offer us his hand when we think that we are sinking. We can metaphorically walk on water when our eyes are focused on Christ. Like Peter, we sink when we take our eyes off of our Lord. Each time, Jesus is present, pulling us up, saying "take my hand.... Come, follow me."

Let's walk with Jesus, inviting friends old and new to be part of the journey. They, too, need to know that God loves the ones in 2nd, 3rd, last place. Serving others from a place of deep joy and gratitude, knowing God is present – always – that Jesus is with us "to the end of the age," they are first.

Thanks be to God! Amen.