

Human things and divine things.

Peter, on the heels of naming Jesus rightly last week, demonstrates this week that he doesn't yet know what that name means. Or rather, he believes it means something it doesn't. And Jesus let's him know. "Get behind me Satan! You are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

I imagine Peter was concerned when Jesus started "showing" the disciples that his suffering and death would soon be coming for him. The predominant image of the anticipated Messiah in those days was someone modeled after King David of old - a military leader who would unite the kingdoms under God once more and expel its Roman occupiers. Even the name Messiah means "anointed one" and being anointed was something reserved only for kings. So people were waiting for a Messiah who would bring glory, victory, triumph, strength and security. And the result of following this Messiah would be the establishing of divine order. To Peter, these were the divine things.

So he would have been horrified to hear Jesus predicting such a different end. The suffering and death Jesus was anticipating meant defeat, dishonor, public shame, humiliation and more. These were the human things to Peter. Where is the 'divine' in any of that?

Jesus in this moment of the story is calling his disciples, us, to see divine things differently. The thing is, what Jesus seems to be calling divine is all rather mundane.

For instance, the popularity of crucifixion made it, though still horrible, a fairly pedestrian thing in the first century. It wasn't an usual sight to see dozens of people hung on crosses in big cities like Jerusalem. It was an effective method of demonstrating Roman rule and what would happen if you didn't fall in line. To be crucified wouldn't have marked Jesus as different or even special. Rather, he would have been relegated to the scores of anonymous trouble makers who defied the authorities and suffered the consequences.

But Jesus' death on the cross was not the whole story. His journey to that cross included all kinds of mundane human experience, including joy and human connection, as well as grief, fear, conflict, pain, abandonment and brokenness. As complicated and hard as these things can be, none of it is really all that remarkable - it's the human condition! Who among us hasn't known such things? But here, Jesus sees them on the way and describes them as divine.

The point of all this is that to deny oneself, take up your cross and follow will likely never involve triumph, flash, dramatic radiant glory, notoriety or anything so uncommon to our daily lives. To follow Jesus in this way will often feel quiet, unseen, unthanked, and as hard as they might feel to do, rather unremarkable. A friend of mine this week called the kind of discipleship Jesus is describing as "rather boring in the end." Truly, this kind of discipleship often feels most concerned with what Peter might call human things. But they are not.

Let me give you an example that's lying close at hand these days.

Our first autumn in this new location is here. It's almost starting to feel like it's new no longer: The parties are over, the blessings accomplished, the crowds have dissipated. The triumph and flash and radiant glory have dimmed and here we are. I was sure fairly soon after the walls started going up last summer, that this building would change things - it would not only influence the shape and feel of this community, it would require something new of us. By the grace of God, we've done well together this summer in the midst of all that change. But something more remains.

When I first arrived at Messiah in the first few weeks of Covid, there were usually six people in worship. Myself and Andrea leading the service, Linda or myself running the zoom meeting. Barb and Lavonne were the congregation, along with Jeri or Marla preparing communion and gathering the offering. We made it work. Thankfully, many of you were attending remotely, filling up the gallery view on our little computer screen. For what it was, we managed to make it somewhat connecting, intimate, a little slapped together, but it was all our little crew could do. Bare minimum was all we could afford.

Three years later, we have been led to a new place - physically, of course, but also in other ways too. We've been in this corner of Red Lodge now nearly five months (summer months of course), but we are still operating as we did during Covid in our little neighborhood church - mostly the same people are doing the same work, only more of it. A few people have thankfully come alongside them in the tasks that need doing for us to function, but now there are more tasks. While more participation is needed, and is possible, it's also important.

I'm not seeking to scold you. Adjusting simply takes time, and the grace of God holds us just as we are. Full stop. But in the security of that grace, could we ask simply "Is 'just as we are' where we want to be?" This is not about simply filling roles, it's about asking who we want to be as *Church* in this place?

It's not only a question about what we want, though, is it? It's a question about that to which we are called. We hear it clearly in today's gospel: If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. But what does that look like in a community like this one?

You, beloved, are the real riches of this church. To see you circulating through these roles in worship and leadership - not as martyrs, not as heroes, but as disciples simply responding to the call - that's a vision of enormous beauty, but it only works when everyone, not only the few, is "stepping to the dance."

And again, it's not only beautiful. To participate in the life and leading of this church, a call to all of us, proclaims our faith in a God who refuses to be resigned to the sidelines. God became incarnate in Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living\* God, and Jesus is made flesh again in our presence whenever we gather - in the reading of scripture, in the operating of the Tech Booth, in the preparation of communion, in the ushering of guests, offering, communion and fellowship. This is why we gather - to encounter our living God in life together. // None of this work is flashy, triumphant, heroically radiant or divine as the world might describe it. It's divine as Jesus describes it - embodied, enfleshed, incarnate in the fullest sense of the word. For we do this work in the midst of complicated, stricken, grief-ridden lives, full of questions and uncertainties. But in doing this work, stepping into the dance, we may just find it to be the life we've been waiting for. AMEN