

## **Sermon for Sunday September 12, 2021**

### **In the name of God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer:**

“Who do you say I am “If any want to become my followers let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

I attend a poetry writing class on Monday evenings. Each week we decide on a prompt for the following week to write on. This past week we all noted that Saturday was the twentieth anniversary of September 11<sup>th</sup>. For most of us, this was one of those life defining moment in our lives. We decided to make defining moments our prompt. Another moment we named was the day John F. Kennedy was shot. Some of us could name where we were and what we were doing that day. I was in my seventh-grade social studies class when we heard the news over the school’s loudspeaker system.

On September 11<sup>th</sup>, my husband David and I were living in London. I had been out most of the day. When I returned home there were two messages on my answering machine. One was from a parishioner at one of the parishes I was serving, she left a message saying how sorry she was for what had happened in the U.S. The other was from my son living in Baltimore, Maryland to tell me that he was OK. Not knowing what they were talking about and thinking there was a major hurricane, I turned on the TV and saw a plane crashing into one of the towers in NYC. I sat and watched as the towers fell and news came about a plane crashing into the Pentagon. My son was working in DC at the time. As the day moved into the evening and I finally was able to talk to my daughter a flight attendant, I could feel our world closing in. The world until that moment had felt like an open book, a possibility, we could see the world, all of it, go anywhere, and then in a moment the world seemed to close down. I imagine others can name the places they were and recall their thoughts. Some have no memory except the memories shared by others. I am sure we can name other such moments in history, WWI the war to end all wars, or Pearl Harbor, and our entrance in WWII. The day the Berlin Wall went up, the day the Berlin Wall came down. For our children and grandchildren, the pandemic we are living in, will be for them one of those moments.

Defining moments are those moments we find ourselves in, personally, in our nation, in the world. They are those moments when the world around us changes somehow. History pivots, an event happens in our personal lives, a teenager's addiction is revealed, and a family's life is changed. An event happens somewhere in the world and the ripple effects spread out beyond the event. Choices are made, and when we look back, reflect on them, notice where we were before and where we ended up after we can find ourselves, our world, our perspectives changed. For some that change may not be apparent at first, they may not notice any change. Until later.

Scriptures are filled with just such defining moments. Eve served Adam an apple. Abraham chose to follow God's call to leave his land. Rebecca and Jacob tricked Isaac into giving Jacob the birthright of a first-born son which belonged to his twin brother Esau. In order to save his people from starvation Joseph brought his family from Palestine to Egypt; Moses then took them out of exile there back to the promised land a 40-year long, epic journey. Samuel bowed to the Israelites insistence on a king. Each story leaves a trail behind and in front as history and God's story continues to unfold with Jesus, who comes teaching, healing, and altering forever the landscape of what was. His life, death, and resurrection change the trajectory of the future for his followers and for all those who came after, including us.

Today's gospel story is one of those life defining moments for Peter. Mark places this story in the middle of his gospel. Jesus has been traveling all over Galilee and beyond to Tyre, Sidon, the Decapolis and now Caesarea Philippi which was once the northern most reaches of the old the kingdom. I wonder what made Jesus ask his question "Who do you say I am?" Why now? Why in this place? Was there something about the conversations along the way amongst the disciples, with him, with one another that prompted his question? They were far from the crowds that followed them, they were together in a good place for this intimate private conversation. Was he ready to tell them about what was coming? Did he sense he needed to say what he had to say sooner rather than later? Was the outside pressure from those in authority becoming so great that he knew he had little time to share what he had left to say? Did he need to ask this one last question before he said anything more?

Whatever it was that brought him there, the questions was out there for them to answer. It became a turning point, in Jesus' life and in the lives of those who followed him. The scene is a bit like a classroom where the teacher stands in front of the class and asks an important question. Jesus first question is "Who do people say that I am? They want to get their answer right. The answers come like popcorn, John the Baptist, Elijah, both are names which had floated around about Jesus. Then he asks his second and more important question. "But who do you say I am?" Did they sit there afraid to answer, were they caught like deer in headlights, wide eyed stunned unable to speak, worried they could get it wrong? Then Peter, good old Peter you can count on Peter to blunder his way in. He says, "You are the Messiah."

Jesus got his answer, he is ready now to reveal to them the rest of the story. As we have seen before in Mark, when something momentous happens, Jesus tells them to tell no one. They do not know the full story until Jesus reveals to them what it means to be the Messiah. He tells them he will be rejected, suffer, he will die and then three days later he will rise again. Mark in his telling leaves nothing out. They all must have been shocked at the very least. What does he mean? Peter goes to Jesus rebukes him. How could he say that? Jesus then rebukes Peter, "Get behind me Satan."

From the moment Peter dropped his nets and walked away from his life as a fisherman to follow this charismatic stranger who became a friend, teacher, and now so much more; all along the way to Jerusalem, the garden, the arrest, the tomb Peter has gotten it spectacularly right and just as devastatingly wrong. Peter could have turned away that day in Caesarea Philippi, could have walked away insulted, hurt. Instead, he stayed, he chose to stay. Confused frightened throughout all the events that followed, he stuck it out. He took up his cross and stepped out into the unknown. Peter lived into the life changing events that unfolded in his life. His choice, his voice carried the kingdom, God's kingdom, a kingdom as different as Jesus was as Messiah forward. Peter and the others carried Jesus' message of love, forgiveness, and mercy the Good News to all who would listen.

Behind the cameras, the images we watched over and over in the days that followed the attacks were people who stepped up and stepped out, some risking their lives. Everyday, ordinary people, first responders, yes, and many others. New

York City opened its heart. Restaurant owners served soups and sandwiches to the crews working the streets clearing debris and looking for bodies. On a remote island to the far north villagers took care of 7000 stranded passengers until their planes could fly again, five days later. In England people gathered to pray for those who had died and those who mourned in a national ceremony at St. Paul's Cathedral attended by the Queen. I stood outside with thousands of others listening to the broadcast of the service over loudspeakers.

What we say, what we do makes a difference. How we live with and into the life changing experiences that happen in our lives makes a difference. What does it take for us to notice? What does it take for us to see, to hear what is happening and see it as something we are called to pay attention to? Does it take a season of deadly fires, devastating storms, human lives at risk due to war and conflicts around the world. At what point do the pictures, the stories of those families caught in the aftermath of whatever the latest news story is, at what point do we begin to see beyond the stranger. At what point do we see Jesus in their faces? Does someone we love, need to die? Does someone we care for need to become homeless for us to see? What choices do we make when a life changing event happens anywhere? Jesus pointed the way. Will we follow?