



The Thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Sunday, August 30th, 2020

The Venerable Peter Scott

Sermon Transcript

Matthew 16:21-28

From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? "For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

The Same But Different

It is good to be back at St. Mark's from my holiday which was the same as other holidays, but different. We certainly live in times when things are the same, but different. It was the same because I got away to my mother's cottage where we live in a separate cabin, but different because we couldn't see family in the same way that we always had; we couldn't have any meals together or share food of any kind, we couldn't be together inside, we had to wash our hands, follow protocols. None of us a year ago could have predicted how this pandemic has played out even if we did know a pandemic was coming and how it would effect our relationships. What I hope has not changed is our relationship with God. Jesus said to Peter in today's reading, *"For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."* This was Jesus' response to Peter whose world was suddenly changed when he heard and could not believe that Jesus must suffer, be killed and on the third day be raised. Peter thought he knew better than Jesus; this must never happen. We can't know the mind of Jesus, of God, in our own time; we don't know how present events surrounding Covid-19 will play out and what they will mean. What we are called to do is set our minds on divine things.

There have been many people throughout history who would like to know the mind of God and believe that that is setting your mind on divine things. We get a glimpse of the mind of God in Jesus, but to say that if we know Jesus then we know the mind of God are two very different things. Even Jesus says that there are things that he doesn't know about, but only God. One of those things was the end of the world, as Jesus states, *"But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only"* (Matt. 24:26). And yet, in these heady times we hear and see people proclaiming that they know the end is near. One of my colleagues in Guelph posted on her Facebook page a picture of a sign on a hydro pole in Guelph which stated: "Jesus is warning many. Time is now up. Sudden destruction coming". I went to the website listed on the sign, but they lost me on their first story that stated the explosion in Beirut was caused by a nuclear bomb.

What does Jesus mean by setting our minds on divine things? The Greek word used for "set" in this verse, means "to seek after, strive for, be intent on."

We have to actively seek after, strive and be intent on divine things. There is a choice here, it does not automatically happen because we are Christians. If we ask what are human things they usually have to do with violence as the solution, money as a goal and fear as a way of life. Divine things would include salvation, love, justice, being with those who are going through a painful time. I recently was speaking with a parishioner who had heard something in one of my sermons about letting go; in this case it was letting go of grief. She asked me to photocopy a copy of a eulogy which she had been carrying around for decades for a loved one in her family. I remember it being one thing in a very busy day and asking myself if this was something that could wait, but I thought this is important. She told me that she had then put it away in a frame in a safe place and that it had allowed her to let go of the grief. It was what mattered to her at that moment. We are called to weep with those who weep which I think is part of greater list of divine things which I will get to at the end of my sermon.

We have been thinking about the future, the near future of our ministry at St. Mark's namely, how we are going to return to in-person worship of divine things at St. Mark's will look like. In two weeks, on Sunday, September 13 we are tentatively planning by permission of the Bishop to return to in person worship at St. Mark's. Some things will be the same and some will be different than before the pandemic. What will be the same? We follow the pattern of using the more traditional communion service at 8:30 and the more contemporary communion service at 10:00 which will be recorded and posted on internet later in the day. The Thursday service will begin on Thursday, September 17 at 10:00 a.m., but we will have to look at a new time for the Thursday morning Bible Study. What will be different? We are only allowed 50 people in the church building at one time. There will be all the protocols that we have gotten used to over the last few months; masks will be worn, there will be no books, no singing by the congregation at 10:00 a.m., no coffee hour, there will be communion, but it will be done differently, no shaking hands and, if you need a cushion, please bring your own. We will be sending out a poll to find out what you are thinking about regarding returning to church.

Jesus asks to live our lives with our focus on divine things. Divine things include the impossible, the improbable, and are not within the realm of what we think might happen without God. I end with the epistle which we did not hear

today from Romans (12: 9-18) that includes that call to weep with those who weep and what might setting our minds on divine things would look like in full: *“Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all”*. I will say Amen to that.