

August 30, 2020

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Reading: Matthew 16:21-28

The Message: Finding Our Way

[Video](#)

The way the Spirit has shown us through our lives has always included

- compassion for those in need,
- commitment to a just society,
- worship of God,
- and a life of sacrificial love towards one another.

Sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ, reading the Scriptures, praying and celebrating communion, worshipping together -- all of these have guided us on our way.

We've had a bit of shake up. This shake up threatens to derail us from our way -- to throw us off guard, to leave us feeling that we don't know the way ahead.

Just moments before the scripture reading from Matthew, as they walked in the region of Caesarea Philippi, Peter and the disciples thought about what Jesus asked them: "Who do you say that I am?"

Peter got it right when he answered: "Jesus is the Messiah, the son of the living God." Jesus is the one who makes **the** difference in the world.

But in the next instant, Peter gets it wrong. Wrong enough, Jesus suggests, for him to be in league with Satan.

When Jesus tells them about the ghastly things that will happen to him at the hands of people who have authority, power, and influence, Peter can't figure out how these things are part of the path that Jesus has taken them on -- surely they are in this for the happy ending! The overthrow of all evil, the turning of the tide toward good.

Peter protests.

"God forbid! This must never happen to you!"

But Jesus' answers: "Get behind me, Satan!"

Jesus resisted using his authority as Son of God for his own purposes instead of serving God's mission in the world. He refused at the beginning of his ministry when tempted by Satan. He wasn't going to give in at the end of his ministry.

1. Instead of hoarding bread made from stones to relieve his own empty stomach, he fed the hungry.
2. Instead of calling on God's angels for his own benefit, he used his privilege to save, heal, and restore the lives of sick and marginalized persons.
3. Instead of grasping after worldly power, he opened the realm of God to all who would follow after him in the way of righteous living.

Jesus refused to be diverted from God's way. Along the way, he showed us what it looks like to serve in the ways of God.

What does Jesus mean when he says, "Get behind me Satan?"

Well, he really means, get behind me! He reminds Peter of his place -- behind Jesus, following Jesus, being a disciple of Jesus and the proper place for a disciple is in the place of a follower.

- "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people" (Matthew 4:19).
- about discipleship: "[W]hoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:38).

And in this week's passage: "If any want to be my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24).

As long as Peter puts his own thoughts ahead of Jesus', he is an obstacle to Jesus' mission.

Nevertheless (and this is significant), Jesus does not break relationship with him. Instead, he reminds Peter of the proper place for a follower.

This is not the first time Peter falters, nor will it be the last.

But the one who is called "God with us" (Matthew 1:23), promising to be "with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20), is already and always **going ahead** of his followers—the first one to face the worst that the world can do.

This is what makes it possible for those who want to become Jesus' followers to take up their own crosses and follow (Matthew 16:24).

Jesus puts his life on the line ahead of all who follow him.

Experiencing the shake up of the past months, perhaps this is a time when we need to attend to our way

- -- to realize that we may have become too comfortable with the status quo,
- that we have assumed that Jesus' way will always be the way it has been;

when what we really need to hear is that Jesus is going ahead on the pathway, as he always has, into the unknown.

We may not know what is behind the gate ahead, but we do know that God will be with us there too.

Just when we think we may have lost our way, Jesus reminds us that we have what we need to discover new ways

- to show compassion for those in need,
- to demonstrate commitment to a just society,
- to worship God, and
- to live a life of sacrificial love towards one another.

Let it be so for you this week.