

I played quite a bit of golf while I was on vacation the last few weeks. I'm thankful to Trinity Church for giving me vacation time, and I'm thankful to Emily Blair Stribling for presiding and preaching for the last three Sundays. It is so helpful for the brain and the body to rest and rejuvenate.

So, one of the things I was contemplating as I played golf with old friends and new, is how in this sport, and I would imagine with many activities, there are times when everything comes together for a nice long easy drive, and there are times when you really shank it into the woods. You know things are going to go off the rails soon if you say to yourself, "OK, I got this now. I've really got it!" So, of course, the very next day, it's back to the old hit and miss.

In the Gospel of Matthew maybe Peter has a similar feeling. Last week, in the Gospel reading that Emily preached on, Peter gets it. Jesus asks him the question, "Who do you say that I am?" And Peter gives the exact right answer. He knows it in his heart – he didn't just memorize it for the big test. "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." He landed it on the green just inches from the pin. Peter must have been beaming from the praise heaped on him by Jesus. "On this rock (which is you, Peter) I will build my church."

But in today's reading, which follows just after the previous verses, Peter tops the ball and it just dribbles a few feet ahead. OK I know, enough with the golf metaphor. But seriously, how can Peter go in the space of two verses from knowing so clearly who Jesus is, to not understanding at all what Jesus must do? And the answer to this is that Peter thought, as all Jews of his day thought, that God would send a Messiah.

But that Messiah, they hoped, would crush the oppressor, Rome, and would decisively return Palestine to the rightful heirs of the land of Canaan. As we heard Mary Anne read from the Book of Exodus, God brought God's people "to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey." Ex. 3:8

Peter knows who Jesus is, but expects Jesus to be what HE has imagined the Messiah to be. We might hear Jesus say to Peter what he said to Philip in John's Gospel, "Have you been with me all this time and you still don't know me?" John 14:9

We really can't blame Peter, though. We're all in the same boat. We all have our own idea of who Jesus is, what Jesus did in his life, and what we hope Jesus will do for us. We too set our minds on earthly things rather than divine things. Jesus, take away this awful pandemic that's killing so many; 180,000 people now! Jesus, take away the systemic racism which infects our hearts and our country. We want Jesus to save us from trouble, like Superman, to swoop down and lift us out of the awful situations that the world's sin and our own behavior has gotten us into.

This is not to say that praying to Jesus about these desperate times is bad. Of course not. It's just that Jesus does not have a magic wand to wave over our country. God's healing grace is upon us even in

the midst of tragedy. And prayer is our way of connecting with the divine, and listening for insight and comfort.

And what Jesus says to Peter and all the disciples (that's us too,) is that the correct answer is difficult to hear and understand, and very difficult to do. We don't want Jesus to suffer and die. We don't want to suffer and die ourselves. We don't want our national twin pandemics to just keep going on and on. Just like we don't like seeing the Biblical vision of Jesus **carrying** his own cross through the streets of Jerusalem beaten and bloody. Where is the peace and prosperity for all people that we long for, that we pray for?

What **we** need to carry – setting our minds on divine things and not on earthly things, is each other. We must work **together** for change, and suffer **together** for comfort. Paul's letter to the Romans tells us today that we are called to "rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.... So far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."

Rugged individualism is a human thing. Extending hospitality to strangers is a divine thing. Paul has the answer right to the question Jesus asks Peter. Paul calls the new Christian communities to the divine. But Paul also has the advantage of looking back on the whole of the life of Jesus; his passion, death and resurrection, to know and to live as God has asked us to live. Peter answers Jesus not yet knowing the whole story.

Paul did deny himself to take up his cross as he went from city to city starting new Christian communities and suffering condemnation and prison for it. He instructed his new communities to dismantle what society thought was normal behavior at that time; eating **only** with those in your own peer group, being helpful and respectful **only** to those who were helpful or respectful to you. Paul had to, and we have to, dismantle unjust and unlovely systems so that we and all people can glimpse what the kingdom is like.

When Jesus says, "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." Jesus means that if we **do** set our minds on divine things, we will see a glimpse of heaven on earth.

Moses saw God in the burning bush. He got a glimpse of heaven on earth by hearing God speak to him and tell him that he sees what is going on. God knows the misery of the people and hears their cries. God will act...through Moses, and the people will come to know freedom. Moses, for his part, even with his fears and doubts says to God, "Here I am." Moses accepts God's call to focus on divine things and get the people organized to leave Egypt.

In this moment, we have a choice to make. Will we be more like Moses who, even in his trepidation said, "Here I am?" God will respond to us just as God responded to Moses, "I will be with you." That is Good News indeed.