

August 27, 2011

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.
Amen.

Over the last couple of days out on the east coast there have been a great number of people fleeing the pending landfall of hurricane Irene. While at the same time a smaller number of people are rushing headlong against the stream of traffic getting ready to offer assistance to those in need. For many those people headed into the eye of the storm are just plain crazy. After all who leaves their safe, comfortable surroundings to head into known danger?

The gospel reading today begins with 'from that time on'. What do these four words mean to us and for the text we read this day? First of all 'from that time on' signals a turning point. These four words make a change in direction for Jesus and his disciples. In the chapters leading up to today's text, Jesus has been traveling all across the region around the Sea of Galilee. He has preformed great miracles, feeding thousands on the sea shore, he has healed all who came to him and he debated with the religious leaders of the area.

Then in the verses just ahead of our reading Jesus asks them a question to determine if this group of disciples had finally understood who he is. Jesus asks them point blank. 'Who do you say that I am?' to which Peter responds with his confession that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Jesus commends Peter on his confession and yet more importantly on his listening to God the Father. For Jesus says; 'blessed are you for flesh and

August 27, 2011

blood has not revealed this to you but my Father in heaven.’ For the first time Peter had not listened to his mind and the world, but heard it in his heart as words to proclaim who Jesus was.

Peter and the disciples almost cry out with joy. Jesus just confirmed for them that he is who they believed him to be. You can almost hear the voices in their heads saying, ‘now the restoration of Israel can begin.’ Jesus the Messiah will soon begin overthrowing the Roman oppressors and we are in the prime place to help take over power. Soon we will be the ones in charge and Jesus will reign on the throne of David just as the prophets of old promised.

‘From that time on’, as it is recorded Jesus began to speak about going to Jerusalem, of his suffering, of his death, burial only to be resurrected in three days. The disciples are shocked as their dreams are dashed. They are once again confused and uncertain as Jesus tells them it is time to leave the safety of lush green hills of Galilee, to leave their hometowns where they are known and supported. Instead they are to journey down the long dusty road to Jerusalem toward a city filled with religious leaders who often disliked what Jesus said. Even more so now that Jesus told them of the events that would take place.

August 27, 2011

But just as Jesus confirms for them he was the Messiah, that he is the Son of the living God, he is the Savior they had been waiting and watching for. Now Jesus stands there and tells them over and over again how they are headed into the eye of the storm. This is the first of three times Jesus tells them he is going to suffer and die. It is no wonder that Peter, the one who was just been commended for confession of who Jesus was would pull Jesus aside and plead with him to take it back and tell them that it was not true. Peter encourages Jesus to join the crowds of people headed the other direction. Peter demands a different path, another way to accomplish the mission without going to Jerusalem

But 'From that time on', Jesus knew he must go to Jerusalem to experience pain and suffering and even death on the cross. Maybe that is why Jesus was so quick to condemn Peter for tempting him to seek a different path, and Jesus knew to do so would be setting his mind on human ways and not on the divine way.

'From that time on' the disciples would experience moments of joy and celebrations, but there would be times of great sorrow and pain. The disciples, like us were having a difficult time understating who Jesus as the Messiah was apart from his suffering and death, or to understand Jesus' suffering and death apart from his Messiah-ship. These events are linked

August 27, 2011

together and one is not possible without the other. Yet we know joy and sorrow are two parts of life that are continually linked together, they are inseparable. We need the joys in our life to better understand the sorrows, just as we need the sad times to remind us of our joys. So we can understand how hard it must have been for Peter and the other disciples to stand there and listen in disbelief as Jesus told them of what was to come. Like them we too want to deny and not listen to any of the words Jesus is speaking.

That was problem for Peter, the disciples, even for you and I. Because we missed what Jesus said; 'I must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering and be killed and on the third day be raised.' Did you hear that last part? On the third day be raised! It is easy to miss, you get sidetracked and your mind goes to other thoughts. They heard Jesus say something about suffering and dying so they missed the rest of the statement, I missed the rest of the statement.

'From that time on', Jesus also knows that it is in Jerusalem where he will also lead the way to the life eternal. Jesus knew who he was and because of the life he lived, because of his suffering and death, we would have a new path to follow. Even knowing where it would lead, Jesus knew ultimately his pain and suffering would lead to the restoration and rebirth. Only then might others be encouraged to take up their cross and following him.

August 27, 2011

These words of Jesus are hard to hear. “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” But ultimately it is not an invitation to follow Jesus into death but rather an invitation to follow Jesus into life, both now and here after. We can follow our Savior if we do not get afraid or distracted by the suffering and death that we forget who we are and whose we are and why we are here in the first place.

Jesus did not let the threat of danger, or of suffering or even of death, to keep him from making his journey to Jerusalem. Because he saw something greater, something beyond and he did not stop until he got there.

We all have a journey to take toward our own Jerusalem. We too have been called to put away the human ways of thinking for the divine ways we have been given. There is a certain amount of pain in being human, in living life in this world, especially when it counts on the threat of death to keep us in line. Jesus’ enemies counted on the threat of death to shut him up and keep him in line. But that did not work. He may have been afraid but that did not stop him. We all have a cross to bear but that does not mean we must put away all the comforts of life, or let go of the necessities of life or to hasten our own death. Because God wants us to live life and live it to its fullest.

In life we will shed both tears of joy and of sorrow, we will celebrate the miracles and mourn the losses, on our journey to Jerusalem where we will both lose

August 27, 2011

our life and find it. But thanks be to God we will not do so alone, for as we find our way to our own Jerusalem we know Jesus is with us, Jesus has gone ahead of us and is walking beside us. Jesus has already overcome the evil so we might not be overcome.

Jerusalem is a difficult place where the fear of suffering or even death distracts us. But it is also the place where Jesus, the Messiah, the ever flowing stream of life finds us and fills us up to overflowing. Jerusalem becomes a place for us where we can rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering and persevere in prayer and join with our brothers and sisters to live in harmony and peaceably with all. In Jerusalem we are refreshed and energized in the waters of life, where we are reminded of who we are and whose we are, where we can lay down our own lives only to find it in the one who came to give us life. Jesus Christ, our Savior, our Lord, our Messiah.

AMEN

T.G.B.T.G.

Pastor Michael