

September 2009

All Saints' Episcopal Church

Sermon Preached by Andrew Goldhor, Intern

“For you are setting your mind not on divine things, but on human things.

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 and for the sake of the gospel will save it.”

So this morning, we get an insight into Peter's thoughts on change. He's scared. He's anxious. He's frustrated. He didn't think he was signing up for this.

He's hearing about suffering and rejection, and clearly that is not what *he* had in mind. Who knew that Peter's situation would sound so familiar and so appropriate to us today?

WHAT do we do when life stops going according to our plan? When everything changes, and we see the gap between our minds and God, what do we do?

All Saints has also reached a time of change, as we prepare to send Kevin forward to enrich another community with his ministries of outreach and spiritual practice. Bonnie is discerning, with the people of Minnesota, her ongoing role of leadership in the Episcopal Church.

And just in the last month Diane Kavanaugh Black and her family, as well as Elizabeth Campbell and her family have gone out from our family to work and live in other lands.

In my life, I am facing the upcoming process of finding a seminary to attend, and hoping that I will be able to stay in Chicago beyond the coming year. In the midst of the ongoing change that defines our reality here, we can start to feel like Peter.

Peter was devoted to Jesus. He was sitting in a boat in the Sea of Galilee one day with his brother Andrew, like they had been the day before, and for heaven knows how long, and Jesus walks by and tells them he will make them “fishers of people” and they have the faith and the audacity to jump out of their boat and just start following him.

And you know, the moment he jumped out of that boat, Peter was in the Gap. The gap existed between God’s calling for Peter and his understanding of what he is doing.

This means that Peter was living his life in tension between his own visions, his own desires, his own ability, and the transforming power of God’s grace.

The grace that helped Peter live out the gospel is what we receive when we reach a crossroads, and we find the courage to turn down a new road, and to grasp a new understanding of who we are, and we do that together as a community in God.

Today, we are nervous about the possibility of having to take on new roles, grieving that old and crucial friendships are about to change, worried about our teachers' futures and frustrated that what we envisioned our future to be is now altered.

But we have these feelings precisely because we too jumped out of our boats. You and I have left the constancy of being simple fishers of ... fish. When we declare that we are disciples of Christ, we are promising to live in the gap between the ways of humanity and the ways of God.

Throughout the gospel of Mark, Peter and the other disciples are always a step behind, always needing Jesus to help them reconcile the difference between their vision and God.

As successful adults, we are trained from a young age to set goals, and to envision our future. And we then set about pursuing these goals diligently, and we do everything we can to attain them.

So we too have a plan, an understanding, a routine, a vision, but **then** things change, and God calls us away from what is comfortable, to inhabit that anxious, risky space—the gap—where we aspire to be open to Divine grace.

It is God's grace that makes it possible for us to see our current transformation as a part of God's invitation to us to continue the work Jesus gave us.

Peter wanted Jesus to live out his life in joy and happiness, continuing his ministry and avoiding suffering. And it's only natural for us to hope and pray that the people we love will have joy and happiness, and that they will be near to us and far from suffering.

And if you focus on the flash of anger that Jesus shows, you might come away believing those hopes and prayers might be contrary to God's calling for them.

But it is not that these natural human values are insufficient, but rather that it is our natural human understanding that fails to foresee how the Holy Spirit is at work in the world with us.

The danger comes when we lose sight of what Jesus is calling us to in favor of the pursuit of security and comfort. Then we fall into *Peter's trap*.

Peter's mistake is that he has his vision for Jesus, and himself, set, and he doesn't want it to get derailed, by persecution or chief priests or anything else.

He has trouble listening. He can't hear the call of God to be the rock of the Church, not yet. He doesn't hear it because he is trying to hold onto what he wants from God, and Jesus, and himself.

I won't make the mistake of saying the choice is always black and white; Following God or choosing our own self-interest. I will soon have to make the choice of where I will go to seminary.

And while jumping back into school can make me a little uneasy, it is WHERE I am going to go to school that really makes me feel a bit like Peter; worried about having to change, trying to hold onto *my* plan, anguished at the thought that I might be distant from the most important person in my life.

I admit this possibility makes my stomach tie up in knots if I sit with it for a while. Yet here I am, setting up a false choice for myself, trying to put limits on what can happen, imposing my vision on God's calling for my vocation, and my life.

I AM IN PETER'S TRAP! If I am really to be open to grace, I believe that—with my diocesan support, I can unite my formation and my life here with Jackie. I can walk a path I don't yet see, with God's help.

And what does God's help look like for us when we are left to make the hard decisions, when the dust settles and we have to reevaluate in the wake of change and transformation?

The truth is that even in our darkest, most difficult hours, we are inseparably bound to Christ, and to the ones we love, both those who are in our lives each week, and those we hold in our hearts.

As a relative newcomer to All Saints, I have not known a time when Bonnie, Kevin, Margaret, Beau, Beth and Wendy did not form the staff and leadership of the church and Ravenswood Community Services. It **will** be painful for us to see Kevin depart, because he has been a tremendous role model and friend.

But as I think about the calling that he has to be a leader in the church, I am thankful that I have had the chance to learn from him, and furthermore to celebrate his departure as he takes up his new calling. Kevin's ministry at the Cathedral in a limited view represents the loss of a teacher and pastor.

But he is living into a calling in a new and demanding place, to spread the gifts of outreach and *21st century technological know-how*.
(Something much needed at this and other churches).

Therefore we are all witness to the choices that Kevin, and others have made, to be *uncomfortable*, to jump out of their steady boats into an unsure place where God challenges us to be continually growing and changing.

And so I invite you to sit with your grief, your discomfort, your anxiety, your frustration, and to contemplate that even though our loved ones and our teachers may not be always be physically readily available to us, we have been forever enriched by their spirit and their example.

Peter certainly lived out his life with Jesus in his heart, and he was empowered to spread the word, and establish the Church that we have inherited. We have been enriched by Kevin, and Bonnie, and every person who has the faith and audacity to give themselves over to our community, where we strive to be out in the margins.

But really, in this holy Gap that we inhabit with each other, it is not a one-way street of blessings. As I look at the faces around this church, I see people who enrich each other, and who give the clergy life. We give each other life.

Kevin and Bonnie have empowered us to be organizers and apostles, and All Saints will always have a spirit of courageous love, and we will never be without the soul of our friends.