

03.09.2017
By Trevor Williams

Introduction

This is the first of three occasions of Jesus showing his disciples that he must go up to Jerusalem, suffer, be killed, and on the third day be raised. Peter's inspired statement that Jesus is the Messiah is followed by the affirmation that this is the foundation rock for the Church against which nothing can prevail. Yet in the following verses (the readings for today) Jesus says 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.'

Questions in preparation to read the text

How can Peter be so right, and so wrong, at the same time? So in tune with the Father's revelation, yet missing the point?

Do you have truths about which you are not willing to compromise?

Text

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.”

Comment

Peter has just responded to Jesus question “Who do you say that I am?” with the inspired reply, “You are the Messiah, the Son of God”. So why does it move from Divine inspiration to Satanic obstruction of Jesus purpose? The problem, it would seem is Peter’s protest to Jesus death and resurrection. Although Peter had acknowledged the identity of Jesus, he had failed to understand who Jesus was and the manner by which Jesus’ purposes would be accomplished. In his protest, he had confused his understanding based on his personal experience, with the ways of peacemaking of Jesus. He failed to understand that it is in self-giving love that the transforming power of God is revealed – power even over death itself. This is so fundamental to the mission of Jesus that to deny it is to become an agent of Satan.

This self-giving love is also the pattern for those who wish to follow Jesus: ‘deny oneself and take up your cross’ means the disciples are not just witnesses of Christ’s suffering but participants in it as well. In the immediate context in which

Matthew is recording the words of Jesus' the meaning of suffering may have been very direct, in that being known as a follower of Jesus may well put your life in jeopardy, possibly even suffering a fate similar to Jesus. However the mark of every disciples' life is that it too will share the death-dealing opposition, injustice and rejection of Good Friday. This is what often follows when your priority is self-giving service for others.

But this loss, this sacrifice, this self-giving will not be in vain. Just as Easter Sunday transforms the meaning of Good Friday from defeat *by* death to the defeat *of* death, so the true value of the self-giving life will be revealed, justice will be done and deliverance secured. This is hope for the disciples, for us and for our world.

Response

Knowing God.

I listened to an Imam talk of his experience of Christian-Muslim dialogue. He spoke warmly of the relationships he had made and how impressed he was that his Christian friends were committed to loving others. There are important differences in our faith traditions, and the statements of our dogmas may not harmonize, but there is something at the heart of faith which can draw us together – Submission to God. Submission to God he explained is to concede that we don't and cannot know everything about God. To confine God to what you know about God is an attempt to 'possess God', the Imam explained. When we make God our own 'god' as a weapon against others. To submit to God is to be always open to learn more of the Truth.

I found a similar thought in the writings of CS Lewis who write in a 'A Grief Observed'

"...My idea of God is a not divine idea. It has to be shattered from time to time. He shatters it Himself. He is the great iconoclast. Could we not almost say that this shattering is one of the marks of His presence?.."

St Paul makes the same point in 1 Cor 13.12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.

When can knowing God, deceive ourselves and destroy our relationships?

How can we be assured that the god we worship is not of our own making?

What do you understand "taking up your cross and follow me" means for you in your context?

Action

Speak to a Muslim about their relationship to God and what 'knowing God' means for them.

Speak to a friend who doesn't profess a faith, to see what guides their lives?

Prayer

Unknowable God
You have shown us your likeness in Jesus Christ
May we follow his example of self-giving love
In the ordinary and extraordinary moments of our lives
so that the transforming power of God's love
may be made known in our time.
We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ AMEN