

Opening Prayer (offered spontaneously)

Do some of you believe you have had a revelation from God?

I think there is a common misunderstanding that we learn what we are called to do by God through a Cecil B DeMille style, revelation. Someone will say something profound to us, or a lightning bolt of inspiration will flash in the silence of a pitch-black night. Once this happens, our lives will be transformed forever. God will call us in a way that is impossible to ignore; and we will answer with every aspect of our heart, mind and soul. Then "every single wandering thought" or troubled aspect in our lives will fall into place, like a line of baby ducklings faithfully following their mother.

The second expectation, is that having had a revelation, we will be transformed completely. No part of us will be untouched. If there are less pleasant aspects of our lives or if we have destructive behaviors, they will vanish. Someone might say, "I turned my life over to Jesus." Once I made that decision, he has guided me every day of my life. In January, Yoshioka Sensei and I translated a Japanese hymn<sup>1</sup> which had these words:

*Over and over, like a mighty sea,  
Comes the love of Jesus rolling over me.  
Over the sea, over the sea,  
Jesus, Savior pilot me.*

Moses Canales preached a sermon which had the central image of a pilot, leading the ships over our lives through dangerous shoals and storms safely, to a safe harbor. There would be no turning back, no need to reset expectations or find another pilot.

O my goodness, how fervently I wished I had this as a daily experience! No longer would it be my responsibility to figure out where to go, what to do, and how to get there. I would simply turn everything over to Jesus and my life would be greatly simplified. Everything I *needed*, not necessarily everything I *wanted*, would be provided. Jesus, as the pilot of my life, would plan every aspect of my voyage through life.

Have you had this experience? This is not my experience, as much as I might wish. But that doesn't matter. After all, as Paul wrote in the Letter to the Hebrews, "*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*" If we can *see* where we are going, that's not faith. Faith is born in a house filled with water waist high in Port Arthur, Houston or Beaumont Texas; a house for which a family doesn't have flood insurance. Faith is a world filled with hungry, desperate people that look at you and me and say, "feed me, I am hungry", "clothe me, I have lost everything".

Our text reads, “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.” In our story from Matthew, Peter quietly takes Jesus aside, and says what all of his disciples must have been thinking, “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you!” While this idea is presented as coming from Peter, I can easily imagine it as one of the voices within Jesus himself. I am sure Jesus had times when he thought, “God forbid it, this must never happen to me!” But then we remember his words of unimaginable faith from the Garden at Gethsemane, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, **not my will** but yours be done.”

Jesus had doubts all the time! Why do you suppose we read about him getting away to a quiet place so often, a quiet place where he could bring all his questions and doubts to God and say, “why God? Why me? Ah...hello, are you really there? I don’t want this to happen to me! Are you sure about this God?”

If Jesus, if Peter could have doubts about what God wanted to happen with their lives, so can you and I!

Our text attributes the denial of Christ’s journey to the cross to Satan. Often when we hear the name, Satan, we remember depictions of a red-faced horned devil. A better title is The Tempter, The Inquisitor, or The Questioner. The Great Tempter whispers into Jesus’ ears, wouldn’t you like to have a normal life? How about a wife with children? The Inquisitor yells at Jesus, “you are delusional, crazy, you have made this whole thing up!” The Questioner is the most devious, as he or she asks, “are you sure? Isn’t there an easier way? Maybe you should tone things down a bit more. Make sure you don’t upset people, says the Questioner, “play it safe.”

As a preacher, I have conversations with The Questioner every time I prepare my sermon. A retired pastor was recently describing a colleague of his in another part of the country. His friend had served the same church for 40 years. It is a big successful, politically connected church, full of powerful people. The main reason the pastor had been there for 40 years was that he never challenged the congregation. This pastor never pointed out the disconnects between the lives of the congregation and the teachings of Jesus. He allowed the Republican leaning members of the congregation to enjoy their wealth and did not speak of sharing God’s blessings. Nor did he suggest that everyone should have health care, or that newcomers to our country should be helped - or any other issue that might be controversial. It is *always* tempting to play it safe.

This pastor had long since shut off the voices of The Tempter, The Inquisitor, and the quiet voice of the Questioner. We need to be aware of all such voices in our own lives, any voice, all voices that takes us away from the Cross. Let me be clear what I mean by the cross. Many of us have suffered during our lives. There is no glory, there is no salvation, in fact there can often be destruction in the crosses in our individual lives. There is nothing romantic, powerful, or positive about being hurt or seeing someone we love be hurt. Suffering, pain, grief and loss *hurt* and there is nothing usually nothing we can do to stop them. They will have their way with us until the season passes, in one way or another. This is one part, and only one part, of what it means to be a spiritual being having a human experience.

If there is any redemption in the experience of the cross, it is in knowing that we are not alone. Someone has carried his own cross to Golgotha, suffered, and died. Because of this, you and are never, ever alone in our suffering. Jesus suffers with us, cares for us, and loves us.

But the translation of the text from Matthew that Karen read may have misled you. It is not, despite what I and other preachers may have said, about our individual crosses. It is about something much larger than our individual lives and concerns, as important as they may be to us.

In fact, Jesus was not thinking about his own life at all. Peter was genuinely concerned about his teacher and friend; and also for the implications Jesus death might have for his own life. Jesus, however, had something much larger, more transcendent in mind – the salvation of all creation; every person, creature, the very planet itself.

This is the path God laid out for Adam and Eve, for Abraham and Sarah, for Moses, Miriam, Deborah, David, Jesus, Peter, with his doubts, and each of us that have followed them - and all that will follow us. The Bazaar and all of the ministries each of you provide throughout the year are not an end in themselves; they are all a part of God's work of salvation.

Our lives are not our own; thank goodness for that! There is a style of art, of painting called pointillism, which had its roots in Impressionism. Georges Seurat and Paul Signac created this style. Entire canvases, scenes, are made by applying individual tiny dots to the screen. Think about dot matrix printers. You and I live our lives as individual dots; perhaps we can see the dots right around us; perhaps we can get a glimpse of what we and other dots look like from two inches away from the canvas, far enough perspective to realize that we, along with other dots, form part of an arm or a flower, on a large canvas.

Jesus was able to see his live in the context of the complete canvas, which is God's plan for salvation for everyone and every aspect of creation. You and I, just like Jesus, will have doubts from time to time about the significance of our work. We will hear the voices of The Seductive Tempter, The Demanding Inquisitor, and The Sly Questioner asking us to walk away from the path to the cross of Jesus. We will say, but I am just one small dot, what difference do I make?

You and I have been called by God to be part of the Great Story of Salvation. We may wander off or be uncertain from time to time about where we are headed. The Good News is that God knows. God is the Great Painter, who knows that contributions that you and I make to provide relief from Hurricane Harvey and other disasters will add up and make a difference. God knows that sooner or later, we will join with others in advocating for the oppressed and the salvation of the only planet we will ever have.

The ways of Jesus, the Great Pilot, are clear if we but open our eyes, heed his voice and follow. It is only by coming back to him again and again, that we can find his path, the path to salvation. That's why we come to Christ's table, why we take and eat the bread and drink of the cup of eternal life. Doing so helps us realize that we are part of his Great Canvas, his Body, broken so that all may be remembered, reconnected, and be wholly his. Amen.

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**Scripture: Matthew 16:21-28 (NRSV)**

### **Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection**

<sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.” <sup>23</sup> 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.”

### **The Cross and Self-Denial**

<sup>24</sup> Then Jesus told his disciples, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup> For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. <sup>26</sup> 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?

<sup>27</sup> “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. <sup>28</sup> 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.”