

August 30, 2020

Jer 20:7-9; Rom 12:1-2; Mt 16:21-27

A lot of our disappointment in life comes from our own expectations. When things go wrong, or when they bring the opposite of what we planned, we can feel that somehow we got jipped. Jesus makes us no promises of a definitely conflict and struggle free life. It is us who set the expectations that are unrealistic - and us that forget that the way through these difficulties is not found in how we try to control events, but in a reliance on the plan and power of God.

Jesus reminds us over and over that there is no lasting gain without cost - there is no victory without sacrifice. Even when we decide to follow Jesus we can hold this expectation that now God has do things for me. This is a very human-like thinking. The reality I have found in my life is that God does take care of those who follow - but just not always in the way that we think it should be. We have such a hard time in letting go of our ways of thinking and seeing things as God sees. We have such a hard time trusting that God has a bigger and better plan, and that what seems to us like a bad thing now will be exactly what lines us up for something better, if we follow God. There is change of thinking that is needed that St. Paul speaks of today when he says: *Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.* As God says elsewhere *My ways are not your ways, nor are my thoughts your thoughts.*

In the Gospel, Jesus is talking about his coming death and resurrection. His followers are looking forward to him doing great things. Just before today's scene, is the one we heard last week where Peter affirms Jesus as the Christ, and Jesus makes him the foundation of his church. Peter was probably expecting some great reign like powerful kings have, that he is going to be the highest official in this reign, that Jesus will live to an old age and bring glorious things through the years. All of that is human thinking - God's plan is a victory, but in a different way

Jesus shakes this thinking with all his talk about suffering, looking bad in front of others, displaying weakness, and having a painful death. Peter probably missed Jesus talking about the resurrection - he heard all this other stuff that in human thinking is bad - and he was going to put a stop to it! He pulls Jesus aside (actually he "grabbed on to him," in the original language). Jesus' rebuke of Peter is sharp: *Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.* Ouch. This statement gives us a lot to think

about. First, maybe Peter was getting a bit ahead of himself. As the new leader did he think he was going to tell Jesus how to do things - we seem to do that - we say "No! God, what is wrong with you, your doing it wrong" - Peter needed to learn to follow and not try to lead Jesus ("Get behind me" - not in front - follow). Calling him Satan seems harsh too. Another time that this specific name (Satan) is used (other times scripture says "the devil") is at the temptation of Jesus in the desert where Satan "takes him aside" and, like Peter, tries to convince him to not follow God's plan, but rather shoot for the human goals of power, prestige, and ease.

Second thing. Peter becomes a blockage to God's plan rather than participating in it ("You are an obstacle to me" - not my friend and supporter - your not helping me really, though you think you are). Somehow when we don't help Jesus, or get in the way of God's plan, we expect that Jesus will just change the plan to give us what we want. When did our personal wants become more important than God's plan? This is an interesting - and human - thought.

This leads us to the third thing. Peter is thinking in a purely human way - not only is he clashing with what Jesus is doing, but God's plan is going to happen in the end, regardless of whether Peter gets on board or not. If you are not with the plan, you will be guaranteed to be disappointed. God's plan is going to play out. If we fight it - like trying to swim upstream in a raging river - we'll just get tired out ("You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do" - if you don't get your head in line with where I am going, then you are going to be disappointed). Only a human would think that God will shift the plan constantly to meet our minute by minute needs and wants. You can say, "I think that God should change the plan to meet my needs" - o.k., go with that - you'll just be disappointed (and it won't be God's fault).

Maybe this following God is a jip in itself. That is what Jeremiah thought after he followed God and lots of things went wrong *You duped me O Lord, and I let myself be duped!* "You tricked me!", he is saying. However, in the end God always protected Jeremiah, and the most important thing was not that he rewards on this earth, but rather that he followed God, advanced God's plan to bring as many as possible to salvation, and achieved eternal life - a payoff better than our plan, and one that we can't even picture or understand with "human thinking." So echoing Paul once again: *Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.* We have to work to renew our minds in this world that prizes human thinking - and get on board with God's thinking and God's plan. This is the path through sacrifice to the reward that Jesus has prepared - beyond where human thought can see.