

30 August 2020

Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Matthew 16:21-27

First of all, I want everyone to recognize the goodness of this moment. We're here together to pray, to honor God and to seek nourishment and direction for our lives. I had a nice moment of appreciating goodness last night while on the home stretch of a long bike ride. I was crossing Water Street and waiting at a light with a young man, probably from Japan or Korea, who was wearing a mask and gave me the vibe that he was new to town and just feeling his way. I had the grace to reach out to him and ask him if he was a student at the university. I could tell English wasn't his first language by the way he listened and responded, "Yes." I asked him if school had started, and he said "Classes begin next week." The light changed to WALK and I said "Well, good luck!" as I started moving away. "Thank you very much, sir!" he said. I thought about him the rest of the way home. What a good guy, respectful, open, risk taking in a new land. He would see a lot of America in the next four months. I prayed that the goodness of our people would inspire him and prayed that the ugliness in our culture would not hurt him.

When I got home I called my only good friend remaining from my ordination class who is a pastor in northern Illinois. He was distraught like I'd never seen him, so affected by the violence in Kenosha. He told me he planned to preach on the evils of abortion AND the evils of racism. "Our country is a mess, Tom," he said. I think he was especially effected because the 17 year old boy with a gun who killed two people in the streets was from northern Illinois. He told me he has two Chicago Bears jerseys, Julius Peppers' and Brian Urlacher's. He said he was going to throw away Urlacher's because of words he said making a hero out of the 17 year old with the gun. I don't want to give it away to Goodwill because I don't want anyone else wearing it either, he said.

As soon as you open your mouth about these topics, in conversation or worse on social media, it's like lines are drawn. The dream of the Kingdom of God dissolves into judgment and resentment and often hate. As pastors, my friend and I don't want that to happen. As Christians, none of us should want that to happen. And yet we have to let our stories effect each other.

Did you hear Glenn "Doc" River's brief remarks after the Kenosha shooting? He played basketball for Marquette then in the NBA for 12 years. He is now coach of the Los Angeles Clippers. It's very moving—you might want to check it out on YouTube—he basically said with a passion that led to tears that he hears all this talk about people being "afraid of us [Black people]" and yet "we are the ones getting shot." Then through tears, "It's amazing why we keep loving this country does not love us back." Before anyone gets defensive or tries to make an argument that his words are unwarranted, we need to listen.

Jesus tells us to take up our cross today. Taking up the cross is surely about going forward in faith without our pain and challenges. It is also about seeing the suffering of Christ in the suffering of others. **Here's a spiritual exercise for you: watch or just remember the scenes of violence you've seen on video in the last week—the shooting, the streets on fire, etc—and after you take that in, look at a crucifix—Christ crucified. And see if you can feel a connection between the two.**

Peter was not too crazy about the cross. He wanted a one-way road to glory with a Messiah of triumph. "God forbid that anything should happen to you!" He says it as a good friend, but Jesus rebukes him as Satan. Wow. He is telling them "My life and your life cannot be about having

domination over others. It has to be about being so grounded in the love of the Father of us all that we want to love and serve all people. If you would gain yourself, you need to lose yourself. What none of the Apostles hear is that after he says he will be killed, he also says “and on the third day I will be raised.”

Without the vision of Resurrection, it's almost impossible to carry the cross.

While bicycling up a hill last week, I played a little psychological game with myself. I hate biking up hills, but I do it because it's good for me. It's always a choice whether to look up or down—looking up sometimes is too intimidating if the hill is long and steep, so I tried never looking up the whole way, AND I pretended that I didn't know how long the hill was. Let me tell you, it was torturous! I had this self banter: “When it is going to end. Will it be forty more strokes of the pedal? Will it be a hundred? Will this ever end?” Sound familiar—it's like **with this pandemic: How long will it go on? Will we have to wear these masks forever?” Without a vision of Resurrection, it's nearly impossible to carry the cross. With a vision of hope and Resurrection, it is more than possible; it's a vocation.**