

Scripture and Sermon for Sunday, March 1, 2015

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous." Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you."

God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

Mark 8:31-38

Then Jesus began to teach his disciples that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "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. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Let us pray....Amen.

Peter, Peter, Peter...the disciple most likely to blurt stuff out. The one most likely to wear his feelings on his sleeve, the one most likely to react with emotion, the one most willing to take a risk with Jesus. Peter, perhaps the disciple most like us...

I'm not sure if you feel connected to Peter in some way...I do. There is an important lesson to be learned in this morning's gospel lesson. It is one of those lessons that keeps teaching us new things about our faith, about our faith lives, and about our faith practice. In fact, this lesson may even have an impact on the way we live out our relationships with other people.

Here's how. Jesus tells the truth to the disciples about how he will meet his end. He describes the suffering, the rejection, the death, and the resurrection that he must undergo in order to fulfill what God has ordained for him.

Peter simply can't stand it. He cannot imagine Jesus suffering, or being killed, and he certainly can't imagine why God would want that to happen. Peter loves Jesus, reveres him, follows him faithfully. And he doesn't want anything bad to happen to Jesus. Ever.

And Jesus puts it into perspective when he stops Peter from protesting, and calls Peter out for having his mind on human things instead of divine things. Peter's worry, his love, his devotion, and his concern for Jesus are all based on human things. Implied in this story, is the idea that if Peter had his mind on divine things, he would deny himself, he would look at the big picture, and he would understand why those terrible things had to happen in order for Jesus to fulfill what God called him to do.

Most of the time, God's faithful children have their minds on human things. *We* have our minds on human things. The list is endless, but here

are a few examples: the world is changing, but we don't want to look at the changes, much less change ourselves. Human things. The institution of the church is dying, but we don't want to look at the ways it is dying, why it is dying, or what it might become after it dies. Our minds are on human things. If Jesus were here today, he would say, 'Get behind me Satan!'

Jesus is quite clear that if we want to start getting our minds on divine things, we will need to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him.

Human beings, by nature, are self-conscious, often self-absorbed, rarely self-aware. For whatever reason, our Creator has created us to spend most of our time thinking about ourselves, about our needs, and about how we are going to get them met.

When we spend time thinking about others, we take a step towards putting our minds on divine things. When we can sacrifice for others, we are clearly thinking about divine things.

When we spend most of our time thinking about ourselves, we take a step back towards setting our minds on human things.

I read an article the other day that was attempting to describe the church of the future, the church that is in the process of becoming a reality. There were ten items, but this is the one that spoke to me the loudest: When a church loves the model more than the mission, it will die.

Buildings, boards and committees, fundraisers, these are church models. Pastors, moderators, officers, paid staff...all models of ministry.

Worship, outreach, advocacy, prayer, stewardship, these are missions.

And when we begin to love the model more than the reason *for* the model, meaning mission, we begin to die.

So you see, we're there right now. We're Peter, hearing Jesus say that the church must suffer, and be rejected, and die, only to rise up again, *and we don't want to hear it because it is too painful!*

Our minds are set upon human things, our beloved church is struggling, and if we could only get back to the good old days when the church was the focus of the community, when it was bursting at the seams with children and young families, when the budget was larger, *then* we could do good mission.

Hmmm. So here's the hard question: what if we were to take an honest inventory of the kinds of mission the world needs, the kinds of mission Camillus needs, and go about finding a structure that helps us do that? What if our 'church' was simply based on whatever 'missions' we decided were most important? What would look different?

How would we structure a faith community if our minds were set on divine things? What would our church look like, both physically and spiritually, if we were deny ourselves our need for sameness, and pick up our cross of mission to others, and followed Jesus?

Now, to be clear, we do some amazing things for our community, near and far. But there are times when I wonder if we don't put too much emphasis on keeping up the model, at the expense of the mission. Often, we find ourselves despairing about the challenges a lack of resources presents to maintaining the model we've grown to love. Instead of being engaged in figuring out what our mission is, and building a model to serve the mission.

The really good news about all this is that like Peter, it's not too late to learn to change our minds, it's not too late to set our minds on divine

things! It's never too late to put our energy into the mission, and let the mission determine what kind of model we need.

That's the kind of work FCC UCC will be doing in the year ahead. With each aspect of our model looking around and seeing what our mission or missions should be...if it is only to serve ourselves, well, then I think you know where the church is headed. But if we discover what our true mission is in this community, if we deny ourselves, pick up the cross of serving others, and follow Jesus, then I believe we can survive the coming suffering, rejection, death and resurrection of the institution of the Christian Church, and FCC UCC as well.

Let's set our minds on divine things, we've got a lot of work to do!

Amen.