

From the Rector's Study, the Rev. Bryce Sangster
Sunday, February 25th, 2024, Lent II
Genesis 17:1-7, Psalm 22:22-30, Romans 4:13-25, Mark 8:31-38

"Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

And: losing and gaining our lives. Gaining the whole world and forfeiting our lives.

I cannot help thinking this relates to control. That we can only have partial control of our lives. We are co-creators with God who thus takes the major role.

In John 8:22, 23 Jesus says: *"Where I am going, you cannot come"?' He said to them, 'You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world.*

This to me speaks not so much about a place but of an understanding of life. Therefore, we cannot either control or fully understand our lives. That God, neighbour and we ourselves remain a mystery.

In other words, we can be selfish and focus solely on ourselves and this world and what we will miss out on the world Jesus is about of.

We can control but we will aim too small. And miss aspects of life which on the one hand may be unpleasant but rewarding in the long run.

This missing out is at two levels. Missing out on the possibilities which Jesus can offer to us, and also at some level understanding.

Science but mainly business come up with models to predict and control a future situation. They come up with all the elements and variables they can think of. But invariably there is at least one variable that is unforeseen and changes the outcome in a drastic way.

Or to now use a model to explain what I am thinking of is the two worlds are like two circles. There are three ways of looking at how the circles relate.

- the two circles are separate.
- there is some overlap with the circles.
- the circle of this world is included in the circle of the world of Jesus which goes beyond this world.

And I have said previously, that when Jesus talks about taking up our cross, another way of looking at it is to take our place on the cross, at the centre and thus be between God and others therefore the cross is not so much a place of sacrifice in isolation but a place and a means to understand making the sacrifice for the benefit of others. That sacrifice is not just for the sake of sacrificing but has a point and a meaning.

There was a discussion at some point about taxation. Yes, we all want to pay less tax than we do. The problem articulated was not so much the amount of tax but the feeling that the taxes paid did not go for the programs the taxes were to pay for. And there was no foreseeable benefit to the paying of the taxes for anyone other than those who did not deserve the money. Waste or corruption.

It is understandable that Peter did not see any benefit to Jesus going to his death on the cross. He was not the only one. A messiah who dies is not the messiah to follow but to wait for one who lives to actually liberate Israel from the Romans.

But if we take the time to look at what Jesus did and accomplished, his sacrifice was not in vain,
And our sacrifice does not have to be in vain either as we follow the way of Jesus and the cross.

And this idea of sacrifice is not always have to do with the big picture of our lives but the small and the daily choices we make.

I have mentioned about Bo Lozoff talking about you having just come from a spiritually uplifting weekend and as you drive home you stop at a gas station and get gas and a snack and the clerk behind the counter is the person who takes your money and gives you back your change. You don't see the person just focus on the hands taking the money and giving back your change. You drive away only to be killed in a car accident. So, the last person you saw you did not see as a real person of value.

I was taking city bus into or out of Montreal. I was sitting in one of the first seats. There was a woman walking around the bus station wearing a brown coat made of suede like material which had seen better days. Then she got on the bus. The worst part was what she was carrying. A clear or almost clear grocery bag. It was stretched almost to the limit, and I could see a big hunk of uncooked bloody red meat. As she got on the bus my unvoiced unsaid prayer was..... Please don't have her sit here. Please make sure you move to another seat. Please don't sit here. My prayer was answered to my relief. But what would have happened had she sat beside me? I wonder.....

But what does it say about the decisions we make? Quick day today decisions? Do those decisions define who we are?

Amen.

May the path that you walk
be ever guided by justice and light
By the truth that you stand.
May it show, into the land.
May the words of Christ
disturb you all your life.
The road you've chosen is not easy
– yet here you stand!
(from the song, The Path, by Jason Mann, adapted)