

Pentecost 13A / Proper 17

September 3, 2017

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Luke's

Jeremiah 15:15-21

Jeremiah frustrated by the plight of a prophet

Romans 12:9-21

How to follow God in our life

Matthew 16:21-29

Peter didn't understand how God works

"Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me. You are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." Peter had proclaimed Jesus to be the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. Jesus praised him and said that upon this rock he would build his church. Now Peter provoked Jesus to respond with the harshest words ever directed toward one of his disciples.

Eugene Petersen wrote *The Message*, which he calls an 'idiomatic translation' of the Bible. His goal in this "loose translation" was to capture in contemporary English the tone of the text and the original conversational feel of the original Greek. Listen from *The Message*, these remarks Jesus made to Peter.

Matthew 16:21-26 (MSG)

²¹⁻²² ~~Then~~ Jesus made it clear to his disciples that it was now necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, submit to an ordeal of suffering at the hands of the religious leaders, be killed, and then on the third day be raised up alive. Peter took him in hand, protesting, "Impossible, Master! That can never be!"

²³ But Jesus didn't swerve. "Peter, get out of my way. Satan, get lost. You have no idea how God works." ²⁴⁻²⁶ Then Jesus went to work on his disciples. "Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat; *I* am."

I was caught up in the phrase, "You have no idea how God works." I can relate to that!

Let me tell you about an experience I had a couple of years ago. At my previous parish in San Jose, the nave has skylights covered with tint film. Over the years the film had disintegrated, and needed to be replaced. When the installers were about half way through the installation, they came into the office to say that something wasn't going right. They didn't like how it looked. Neither did I. They called their office, and decided to quickly install film on all of the skylights, so we could have some tinting, but they would be back to fix the work. Okay...

After two weeks I had not heard a word from them, so I called to ask what was going on. I talked with the owner of the company. They had identified the problem, and would be out in a week to install new film. Ten days went by with no contact. I called again, talked to the owner again, who said that an installer would stop by to caulk the windows and that would finish the job. I was not happy. I told her that I needed her or the sales person to come out, to see what our concerns were, and to discuss how it is going to get fixed.

To shorten the story, I stayed calm for the visit. The sales rep finally shared that the owner was his mother, and she was ill; in fact she was having a doctor's appointment that same morning to see what treatments were possible for her illness. He explained that he is

a Christian. He loves God, he loves working with his mother, and he appreciated our restrained response to what had happened. We hugged, and the work was finished in about 10 days. God was at work in keeping me quiet, learning about his mother, learning about his faith, getting to pray for his mother. I have had a lot of those surprises in my life. Can you think of some that you have experienced; staying calm and seeing the mood change?

In Peter's denial of Jesus telling them about his coming passion, death and resurrection – an outcome very inconsistent with being a Messiah - it is very clear that Peter had not figured out yet how God works. He was trying to 'be there' for Jesus, but by the rules of the world, rather than accepting that God could work by a whole different set of rules.

Paul described to the church in Rome what life is like when we live for God instead of living for ourselves (i.e., dying to self). Our God challenges us to outdo one another in showing honor to the other person. We are told to bless those who persecute us. We are to connect with people so that we feel their joy and their sorrow right along with them. We are to live peaceably with everyone. This way of living is not just to show how good Christians can be; it is how we keep our relationships open for God to work in those relationships. *(repeat)*

From my experience as a project manager, and as an engineering manager, I knew how to be tough to get our sky light project fixed. **I am so VERY glad I did not do that.** If I had lost my temper, I would never have had the chance to know about the mother's illness, to be there for the son, and to pray for his mother. This is one of the BIG ways that deciding to follow Jesus Christ has changed me; being tough is my last resort and not my first response. Being in sync with how God works does not mean we have to know what God will do next; but it DOES mean that **we have to provide the space for God to be in the driver's seat**.

I know that life will give all of us plenty of chances to practice Paul's list of character values that please God.

We need to set our minds on divine things;

We need to avoid preempting the peace, or honor, or love that God can bring;

We need to offer the time and space and open mind for God to be in our life.

We need to learn from Peter and Paul, to allow the works of God to be the driving force in our day. Amen.