

Sermon for September 15, 2024
Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost
Proper 19b
The Rev. Canon Raymond Raney
Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church
Los Alamos, New Mexico

Isaiah 50:4-9a
Psalm 116:1-8
James 3:1-12
Mark 8:27-38

So Jesus and his merry band are walking along,
probably chatting about what's been going on.
All of a sudden, Jesus turns to them and asks:
"Who do people say that I am?"
And of course, they start quibbling about what they've heard others say in the towns and
villages they've visited:
"Well, some say Elijah and others says one of the prophets."
Okay for them, but you've been with me for some time now, So:
"Who do you say that I am?"

And it's Peter who blurts out: "You are the Messiah."

I can imagine the other disciples stare at Peter
and then look at each other, thinking about what that means.

Messiah is the Hebrew word that in Greek is translated as the Christ. It means "the anointed
one."

If you recall, David was God's anointed,
anointed to be King by Samuel.
There were others before and after who claimed to be messiahs.
At that time, the Roman occupation had gone on for some time,
and the people were ripe for rebellion.
They wanted a messiah, a messiah who would lead them
to overthrow the tyranny of Rome.

That may be the kind of Messiah
Peter thought of when he declared Jesus was he,
but that's not the messiah Jesus tells the disciples he is to be.

"Then he began to teach them 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."

“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.”

Human things: To overthrow the Roman oppressors;
to restore the right and the good to the religious leadership;
to be honored as the spiritual leaders of the nation;
to live without fear.

This past week we observed two anniversaries.

Wednesday marked the day 23 years ago when 3,000 of us died
in the collapse of the World Trade Center towers in New York.
It was a time when fear was rampant.

There’s one thing greater than fear – HOPE.
Hope defeats fear.

If you remember the stories that came out back then,
the hijackers who took control of the planes
that September 11th morning used false hope
to keep the passengers in control.
The passengers were told that if they cooperated,
they would be set free once the demands of the hijackers were met. The passengers
remained in their seats
believing they had a chance to live.

That was not so for the passengers of Flight 93.
They had been on the phones with family members
and knew what had happened,
and could not be deceived into cooperating.
They took action, sacrificed themselves
and the hijackers were kept from their goal of greater destruction.

The greatest symbol of hope in the world today
is the Cross of Christ.
Yesterday marked the observance of Holy Cross Day.
This celebration dates back nearly 1,700 years to Jerusalem
where the Empress Helena found the true cross
while constructing shrines to God in honor of her son,
the Emperor Constantine.

The Cross was the penalty used by Rome
to humiliate those who were considered threats to the Empire.
So how could such a horror turn into a blessing?

Because the other side of the Cross is the Tomb
and the Resurrection.
It was on the Cross that Jesus “died – once for all.”

The Gospel we read today tells us that Jesus told the crowd:

"If any want to become my followers,
let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

So what does “take up their cross” mean?
What Cross is each of us to take up? What are our crosses?

I was raised believing that our “CROSS”
was the pain and suffering we each had to endure in this life.
I was raised believing that our CROSS
was the physical, emotional, and spiritual agonies
that we each suffer alone as part of being human.

But this week, reflecting on all that has gone on in the world,
and contemplating the lessons, I’ve come to a different conclusion.

Jesus was crucified on the Cross to the glory of God.
The Cross in the Gospel of John
becomes the throne on which Jesus the Christ
is raised up before the world.
If Jesus asks us each to take up our Cross,
it must be to the glory of God.
So what is the Cross each of us is beckoned to bear?

I believe that our Cross is the God-given abilities, our gifts,
our talents, our visions.
We are asked to seek out what it is we offer the world.
We are told to hone our abilities
that they might be used for the benefit of all of us.
We are lifted up to cherish the gift of our lives
to take each breath to the Glory of God.

That is our Cross:
To live into the Truth of who we are, what we can do,
and where we can go to build the Kingdom of God.

We are called to live our lives to the Glory of God.
That is no small task.

We are called to do all we can to live into our Baptismal Covenant, which says that we will:

- do all we can to resist evil and return to the Lord when we fail
- that we will proclaim the Good News of Christ;

- that we will be an example for others;
- that we will serve Christ in others;
- that we will love our neighbor as ourselves;
- that we will seek justice and peace for all people; and
- that we will respect the dignity of every human being.

The challenge is great.

The call is beckoning us to live into Christ –

- not through pain and suffering,

but through the striving to make known the joy of the Kingdom, where the sick are healed,

where the hungry are fed,

where the naked are clothed,

and where the stranger in the land is made welcome.

We pray for the assistance of God. As we prayed in today's Collect:

O God, because without you we are not able to please you, mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

God Bless us each and all as we take up our Cross and follow Christ.

Amen.