

Matthew 16.21-28 & Romans 12.9-end T12 2020

You are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things... In this year of pandemic, we have had to change the way we think about our engagement with reality. Look at us. Who would have thought in January that we would look like this, sit like this, worship like this? We have had to think our way into a new reality. In today's Gospel reading Peter says something nice and supportive to Jesus only to find himself on the receiving end of a stinging rebuke. His mindset, his reality is rubbing up against the reality that Jesus is working with and there is a world of difference. Peter goes from being celebrated and rocklike to being resisted and a stumbling block (clearly the geology is influencing Jesus' language) in a very short time. Indeed, Jesus hears in the words of Peter, the Satan, the deceiver. This takes us back to Matt 4 where Jesus is tempted by the offer of all the kingdoms of the earth and their splendour if he gives his allegiance to another. Jesus resists but Peter is playing with this reality without realising it.

Peter has just proclaimed that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. They don't come more powerful than that. And in Peter's head he is thinking next stop Jerusalem, setting up the King in his kingdom with guess who in attendance. His view of Messiahship is giving voice to the Deceiver. That's what is in his mind, and he walks straight into **You are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things...** Peter's mental constructs, way he sees the world, himself and his very existence needs to undergo what St Paul talks about in Romans 12 – **be transformed by the renewing of your minds.** The Greek word for transforming is metamorphoo which is the word that Matthew uses in his next passage to describe the transfiguration of Jesus. This is challenging territory because **mental constructs** are so deeply ingrained in us, and backed up by so many experiences, anxieties and emotional baggage, that we fail to see them as just opinion. Are for us, our created reality.

Three mindset changes to ponder. Two from today's Bible passages and one from this year's context. **First**, from Matthew 16, the meaning of life is found not in clutching our lives to ourselves, making our CV's, our success, rights and needs and privileges central because then we lose our life. That is the way of becoming less human. Rather, die to the agenda of self-assertion and self-justification and live to give. Taking up your cross is not some kind of fatalism, 'it's the cross I bear', rather it is a free choice to surrender ourselves to God as in this prayer by 4th century John Cassian. O God be all my love, all my hope, all my striving, let my thoughts and words flow from you, my daily life be in you, and every breath I take be for you. That's a shift.

But so is Paul's recommendation of non-retaliation in Romans 12. Revenge and retaliation are not the redemptive way. Instead, in adversity embrace another way. Bless, do what is right, live at peace, overcome evil with good. Utterly unusual in Roman world and pretty counter cultural today particularly with all the current political noise in the background. Both these are counter intuitive.

And finally from this year of pandemic and protest. This week we recalled Dr MLK's 'I have a dream speech.' Against a backdrop of the Windrush report recommendations, George Floyd's death and the Black Lives Matter movement many of us have begun to reflect deeply on the way that we are wired. Come to see the invisible influence of white privilege that creates unconscious advantage, bias and hence, injustice. We feel the challenge of the moment for metamorphosis, transformation, this is the Peter moment.

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Faith is a journey into the reality of Jesus and way he sees the world. This will involve the renewal of our minds which is made possible by a dynamic combination of our fellow human beings, the word and Spirit of God and our desire.

Thanks be to God.