

Sermon  
13 Pentecost-Proper 17-A-2  
St. Andrew's, Methuen  
August 30, 2020  
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Jeremiah 15:15-21  
Psalm 26:1-8  
Romans 12:9-21  
Matthew 16:21-28

Peter, the Rock, names Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ, the anointed of God. He then assumes the next step will involve long strategy sessions to plot out how to gather followers to join them in going to Jerusalem, where they will take control of the Temple, remove the compromised religious leaders, overthrow Pontius Pilate, and finally restore God's Glorious Kingdom. **Everyone knows this is how such things are done.**

Jesus, however, has a different plan. Instead of throwing out the religious leaders Jesus must suffer at their hands. Instead of removing Pilate, Jesus must be killed by Pilate. Only then will God's glorious realm appear—as he is raised on the third day.

Peter flips out: "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." **How do you defeat your enemies by letting them defeat you?** In what universe does this ever work?

Apparently, Jesus thinks it works in God's universe and applies it not just to himself but to his followers as well: **"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 will find it."**

To paraphrase John's gospel, Jesus says the only way you get an oak tree is if the acorn is willing to be dead and buried in the ground. **No other way:** the acorn can't think its way into becoming a tree, can't eat the right diet to become a tree, can't worship the tree. **Only way to become that tree is to enter the darkness.**

Jesus, therefore rebukes Peter: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; **for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.**"

**Remember last week Paul said the same thing: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds."**

**If we also want the transformation of our consciousness so we can experience the Realm of God, we, like Jesus, must be willing to enter the darkness of unknowing what we think we know, in order to know what only God knows.**

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**So let's talk about being in the darkness.**

In 2010 I went with James, my 10-year-old nephew, to a museum in Atlanta called "Dialog in the Dark". After buying our tickets I put my watch and cell phone in a locker because they emit light. Then we are each given a white cane that the blind use and enter a small room with three others taking this interactive tour. We each sit on a small lighted cube. Gradually, the lights go out and there the five of us sit in total darkness, clutching our canes. I can't see a thing—not then or at any time during the next hour. It is the most darkness I've ever experienced.

My first thought was to worry about James—surely in this blackout he will become frightened and start either crying or screaming, but he does neither. I, on the other hand, have to choke down my own rising dread.

It isn't monsters or villains I fear. **I'm afraid of not being in control.** I have no idea what's about to happen. I only know that I have lost a significant ability to be in charge of my life.

We were told that if we become too afraid, we can say so and someone would remove us from the situation, but I'm not about to embarrass myself.

So, I breathe deeply, hold on tightly to my stick, and then, mercifully there is a voice not too far away that says, **"Hello, my name is Peter and I will be your guide today."**

**Peter's voice is reassuring and friendly. He has my complete attention because his voice is the only thing that is going to get me through this encounter with total darkness.**

I think Peter must be wearing night vision goggles, but it soon becomes clear that Peter is stone blind.

**According to human sense, he is as much in the dark as we are, but he can see in ways we can't imagine.**

Peter tells us to stand up and start walking toward his voice. Slowly, with small careful steps, my cane working in front of me, **I head toward his disembodied voice as an act of faith.**

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 Jesus calls us to trust him in the same way we were trusting Peter. **And for the same reason: Jesus knows God's way in the darkness of this world. If follow the world's way, we will create more pain and chaos for ourselves and our world, no matter how much control we think we have.**

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Turns out that Peter is an excellent guide. We make our way into another room where I find vegetables and fruit in baskets, though I have to smell the garlic and the lemons to figure out what they are. He leads us into a room with grass and birds chirping. Then we go over a bridge and he helps get us into a boat. The scariest moment is when we cross a street with the sound of cars whizzing by.

Finally, we seat ourselves with Peter in a booth with a round table where someone new, and equally blind, takes our orders for something to drink. I get a Diet Coke. Then we dialogue in the dark.

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**You don't need me telling you that we are living in a time of great darkness:** pandemic, high unemployment, political chaos, and wondering whether Black lives will ever be given the same respect, dignity, opportunity, and privilege as White lives, to name just a few issues.

If we continue to trust human thinking, we will continue to go around in circles wounding ourselves and others, solving nothing.

Instead, we are called to listen to the voice of Christ who will lead us into a new way of living.

I like how Joel Goldsmith describes it: "Let [your] mind be an instrument of awareness and instead of trying to break your head against an apparently insoluble problem, worrying about what the next step should be or what you are to do tomorrow or the next day, form the habit of listening with your mind, using it as an instrument of awareness. Let God fill your mind." *The Art of Spiritual Healing*

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After his collision with the Risen Christ, Saint Paul, blind for three days, enters his own darkness, as God rewires his mind to receive the Mind of Christ, God-consciousness. From there comes the wisdom of Paul today, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink.... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

**We practice our faith in God, by daily entering our inner silence and darkness, what Jesus calls "praying in secret", to listen to the voice of Christ who is slowly rewiring our mind to receive his Mind, the awareness of God.**

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One last note about "Dialog in the Dark": The several times we had to line up, Peter would ask who was in the front of the line closest to him. Turns out it was my nephew James, the only child among us.