

August 31, 2014

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

"You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.".

This Sunday, the twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, Matthew's Gospel picks up right where we left off last week. Last Sunday we heard Jesus' question, "**But who do you say that I am?**" and, in response, Peter's great confession, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God This morning we'll focus on the scene that follows. In the words of the late Paul Harvey, "And now, for the rest of the story!"

After Peter made his confession, Jesus commended him and went on to tell the disciples what was to come.

"From that time, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up."

When Peter heard that Jesus was to suffer and die, it appears he just lost it. He rebuked Jesus ...which was way out of line,.... but Peter didn't care about that . Peter loved Jesus the man, and was determined not to let this fate happen. You can just hear the desperation in his voice: "Far be it from you, Lord!"

Unintentionally, to be sure, Peter – the rock upon which the church was to be built – became a stumbling block standing in the way of Jesus' destiny to redeem a fallen world.

Peter knew and loved Jesus the man, but Peter failed to get the full picture.

Peter missed the real message that Jesus the messiah was bringing to the world. That God's Kingdom is where the real action is at.....as I sometimes describe it. Life in this world is an opportunity to show what we are capable of and how much we are able to be committed to our loving God.

Many people have a very good understanding of the details of life in this world, but fail to see the big picture.

My great Aunt Hilda decided at the young age of 89 to go on her first ocean cruise; but in response to her family's concern for her not going alone, she went with a young friend of hers.....Amy aged 82.

Hilda booked a cabin with an ocean view and was very excited to watch the sunrises or sunsets and the wonderful views of the Mediterranean Sea.

On boarding the ship and after stowing her and Amy's extensive amount of baggage, but before the ship left the port, Great Aunt Hilda and Amy went for dinner, They both then returned to their cabin and opened the curtains....and they had a nasty shock...no ocean view..all they could see was the docks, cranes, baggage still being loaded.

Great Aunt Hilda was disgusted and called the captain on the internal telephone. The captain listened quietly, and said that once the boat sailed, he would have them moved. Aunt Hilda thanked the captain, closed the drapes and settled down for the night.

The very same people who stand for Jesus often stand against him. As Christians, we always need to be asking ourselves, "Am I a solid rock of faith, or a stumbling block inhibiting the faith of others?" My hope is, by asking ourselves this question, we'll be more intentional about our Christian witness, we will have an improved perspective....an improved understanding of what Christ was telling us.....we will see the bigger picture.

Great Aunt Hilda.... and her friend Amy had a wonderful night's sleep. They learned that modern cruises contain proper comfortable beds and neither cots nor hammocks.

Hilda drew back the drapes and there was shining blue water as far as the eye could see. She got up , immediately got on the phone to the captain. Thank you so very much for moving us....and a particular thanks to the crew for not even waking us up. What wonderful comfortable beds you have on this ship. The Captain responded "you are so welcome."

It is easy for us Christians to be absorbed and even fall in love with the details of our religion. The colors, the art, the beautiful and familiar words of our Liturgy. It is all so impressive and oh so comforting....but I suggest to you, and with every respect, these are the mere details and not the full picture of our Blessed Lord

who suffered and died for us. Our Lord who rose again on the third day and who waits for us all in our real home.

Who do people say that I am?" asked Jesus of His apostles. He wanted a sampling of the fruit from the grapevine.

it seems that Jesus had been getting some National Enquirer-type coverage. The apostles told Jesus the stories that had been going around. Rumor had it that He was a reincarnation of some hero of the past, some religious leader of days gone by.

You can just see the headlines: **"THE PROPHET ELIJAH RETURNS IN THE FORM OF CARPENTER TURNED WONDER-WORKER" or "THE SPIRIT OF BEHEADED JOHN THE BAPTIST TAKES POSSESSION OF FIRST COUSIN FROM NAZARETH."**

Sounds off-the-wall, but rumors about celebrities are often like that, aren't they?

Last week, turning to Peter, Jesus brought the question closer to home. "Who do **you** say that I am?" It's one thing to talk about other people's opinions and speculations. It's quite another to go on record by expressing your own convictions.

From time to time, we all talk idly about other people's views, it's easy to evaluate, ridicule, renounce or commend those views from a safe distance. The comments don't obligate us, they don't impinge on our lives,

We can play at being objective, dare we say it even superior when we criticize from a safe distance and if a certain position becomes unpopular and is attacked, it's no skin off our nose. But it is skin off our nose....because it is destructive, by avoiding putting our convictions on the record we offer nothing but negativity.

Here together this morning, here in this loving, intimate, comfortable place...the question that leads to today's Gospel still applies.

Jesus asks each one of us "Who do **we** say that he is?" Do we get the big picture?

I suggest each of us, if we search our hearts, we face a dilemma.

We are faced with a chasm between Jesus' call to discipleship and our own lives as part-time volunteers for the Gospel.

If we are brutally honest to ourselves, few Christians abandon everything for the Gospel's sake. Most of us fit our Christianity into the open spots in our calendars.

Of course there are reasons for this....we have so many practical everyday responsibilities as human beings to attend to. Whether it is our work, maintaining our loving relationships, raising our families, looking after our health.....all the 1,001 issues that fill our lives to be able to not just survive but be successful in our lives here on the planet earth.

I am not giving us a way out, but it is very easy to lose sight of the big picture and be bogged down with the clutter. The noise and hyper activity on the dockside that my Great Aunt Hilda could see from her cabin window, compared with the beautiful view of the ocean that she expected.

In the Gospel today Jesus links the life of discipleship with his own path in his life here on earth. When it comes to standing with Jesus, there's no middle ground. In the 12th chapter of Matthew's gospel, Jesus told his disciples, " Anyone who isn't with me opposes me, and anyone who isn't working with me is actually working against me"

We are either for our Lord Jesus or we are against him. To be His disciple, we don't have the luxury of straddling the fence.

Let us bow our heads and ask the Holy Spirit to guide us.....to remind us what it takes to be a true disciple, so that when our Lord tells us "You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

Let us respond as one voice "We will deny ourselves and take up your cross and follow you". .....Amen