

What's the Buzz?

Have you ever wondered what other people think of you? Ever been curious how you are viewed by the community in which you live? It's a very common curiosity to know how one is seen, how one is thought of.

That's what's happening in today's gospel. Jesus and the Dudes have just left Caesarea Philippi where Jesus fed the 4,000 with food left over. He went for a boat ride, discussed having and not having with the disciples, and cured a blind man at Bethsaida. Now they are walking together and Jesus asks them, seemingly the same question "who do they say I am?" (Mark 8.27, NRSV) The crowd sees Jesus as John the Baptist, or Elijah or another of the prophets.

Jesus then flips the script and asks directly "But who do you say that I am?" (Mark 8.29, NRSV) and it appears that Peter answers immediately, "You are the Messiah". (Mark 8.29, NRSV). Messiah was believed to be the one who delivered the Hebrew people to freedom. The Messiah was believed to be the one who would deliver the Jewish Nation. The Hebrews had been waiting all their lives for the Messiah to come and save them...and Peter just figured out who the Messiah is! Yay Peter.

EXCEPT, Peter, with the other disciples is told very sternly, not to tell anyone about who he is. Jesus knows, but the others do not, that there will be many trials and tribulations before his true identity can be known. Peter, knowing that Jesus is the Messiah, tries to protect him at all costs. A very natural and understandable reaction for Peter to have.

And so, when Peter hears all the suffering and death that the Messiah is to experience, he tries to talk Jesus out of it. It makes sense, Peter loves Jesus and doesn't want him to suffer. And yet Jesus rebukes Peter and the poor lad goes from the first to recognise Jesus as Messiah to one who hears "get behind me Satan." (Mark 8.33, NRSV). Poor Peter.

Judy Ford notably said "your opinion of me is none of my business." and it's very true. When we get tied up in worrying about what others say or think, is when we, like Peter, have our mind and heart on human and earthly things, rather than on heavenly and divine things.

The reading from Proverbs touches on this another way. Lady Wisdom is calling the community together. She has been trying to impart her knowledge and wisdom to them, yet they are not interested. And so, she's trying the classic reverse psychology. They won't hear her lesson, so she's going to tell them not to listen to her, because she doesn't have anything worth hearing.

My nephew Nathan is at the age where he wants to be in the middle of every conversation, and his parents have warned him off with the phrase "that's not kid-friendly". Unfortunately, Nathan has cottoned onto this phrase and applies it to everything, from the music we listen to in the car "Auntie Andrea, is this song kid-friendly" to an ordinary conversation I'm having with his parents. "Can I visit too, or is this conversation not kid-friendly."

Lady Wisdom is frustrated. She laments "How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge?" (Proverbs 1.22, NRSV) Feeling frustrated she continues "Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently, but will not find me." (Proverbs 1.28, NRSV)

But lest you think she is cold and withdrawn, with no respect for those with whom she is trying to communicate, she says "For waywardness kills the simple, and the complacency of fools destroys them; but those who listen to me will be secure and will live at ease, without dread of disaster." (Proverbs 1.32, 33, NRSV)

It's not that Lady Wisdom demands that only her voice be heard, it's more that she wants to impart her knowledge, very important knowledge to folks who are quite content with status quo. She seeks to shake them up and teach them the way, so they are not left to their own devices and, as such, will perish.

Yesterday was the 20th anniversary of the terror attack on the United States, when two planes intentionally flew into the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in New York. There were 2,996 deaths as well as over 25,000 injured. The United States and her allies, including Canada and Great Britain, went to war with Afghanistan, which lasted just over twenty years. The last troops left Afghanistan late last month. Now, whether the so-called War on Terror was justified or not, it is estimated that there have been over 900,000 deaths post 9/11 and the cost of this war is a staggering \$6 trillion dollars.

There was a time when the war in Afghanistan seemed justified, and there was also a time when the war seemed like a 21st century replay of Vietnam.

Regardless of how you feel about this, reputations were made and broken during this time. There have been many notable elections, including presidential elections that have swung from the historical (Barack Obama elected first black President) to the ridiculous (Donald Trump elected the 45th President of the United States).

All of this to say, sometimes we get it right, and sometimes we do not. Sometimes the advice we receive is good advice, and sometimes, especially with reflection, is not.

In Canada, we are in the middle of a very tenuous quick federal election. I know we are tired and annoyed with the timing of the election. There's not been much time to talk to candidates about the issues that matter to us. And yet it is our RIGHT as Canadians to VOTE in the election. I stood in line for an hour on Friday to vote in the advanced poll. A friend of mine went today and waited five minutes. PLEASE do your civic responsibility and vote.

I'm at a point in my life where other's opinion of me, does not matter to me. At one time, if I thought someone didn't like me I was devastated and felt a colossal failure. I no longer feel that way. Don't get me wrong, we all want to be liked, but I'd rather be respected.

Who do people say that I am? Asked Jesus. He received his answer. Who do YOU say that I am? Was his next question and he received a very different answer.

I may be completely incorrect, but in my mind, Jesus asked the question and then waited as the disciples found sudden interest in the floor. Except for Peter. Hand raised "PICK ME, PICK ME" was his body language. Jesus acknowledges Peter's enthusiasm and when he says "YOU ARE THE MESSIAH" the other disciples are flabbergasted and Jesus is caught ever-so-slightly off guard. And so he tells all of them to say nothing about who he is.

'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, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.'

(Mark 8.35-38, NRSV)

Jesus is setting up his disciples and followers. It sounds like reverse psychology, "those who want to save their life will lose it", etc. And yet, Jesus is referring to the heavenly body, not the earthly one. And to those who worry less about how they are viewed and instead focus on what they are doing, especially for the poor and downtrodden, will receive God's grace.

We need to be mindful of our words. We are all tired...and dare I say fed up with this whole COVID thing. To vaccinate or not. To receive a vaccine passport or not. To self-isolate, or not. To return to Church in person, or not. There is not a one-size-fits-all answer to any of it. We need to know who we are, and whose we are.

We need to stand strong in our beliefs and yet not be afraid to share our fears and insecurities. We need to move beyond saying "when this is over" because, my brothers and sisters, I fear we need to learn to live with COVID as the epidemiologists, doctors and other medical professionals help find a way to get ahead of this devastating virus.

The Church as we once knew it, is no more. In its place is a beautiful, complicated, messy and fabulous opportunity to know God. To really KNOW the Divine, regardless of whether we gather online or in person. We have our history and will retain much of it. We have learned new skills and ways of being that most of us had never dared to imagine. And yet, here we are.

It's not been easy up to this point, and it appears will not be getting easier for a while yet. But we are resilient. We have survived the crusades, several world wars, foreign and domestic terrorism, an increase in intolerance and hatred and yet we continue to seek relationship with all we encounter.

Because deep down we know, WE KNOW that the only way to survive hatred and fear is with love. Jesus knew that and gave his life for us, that we may learn that. Together we can, and we will. Individually, and better yet, collectively. Love conquers hatred. Knowledge conquers ignorance. Always.

Thanks be to God. Amen

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Proverbs 1.20-33

Mark 8.27-38

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