What a difference a day makes. Last Sunday Peter was proclaiming the truth of Jesus the Messiah and Jesus named him the Rock upon which he would build his church. In this next portion of Matthew’s gospel we encounter today, Peter becomes a block in the road upon which Jesus will stumble. What a difference a day makes. What has changed?

As I was thinking about this I found myself remembering waking up the day after Bob and I were married. Now we had been together for several years and had been deeply committed to each other for some time. We shared our daily lives, encouraged and supported each other. And on that morning, Nov. 3rd, 1986, I woke in our apartment, expecting just another day. And truly, had anything really changed in just one day? The answer was both NO and a resounding YES! You see, somehow, I was more than I was the day before. In that “more”, I could feel a deep connection to Bob that perhaps had been there all along, but on this day was fully present to me. In that connection was promise and possibility and potential. There was a new destination and journey that was at the same time fully mine and fully ours. What a difference a day makes.

This portion of the gospel today marks a pivot point for Jesus and his followers. Perhaps Peter woke today, along with his compadres, with new excitement and expectation of an unfolding of the Messianic action plan; a Godsend, a way out from under the oppression of the Roman Empire. This is something they can all get behind.

Here’s what Matthew says, *“Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”*  Matthew does not say exactly how Jesus was to get the message across to them, but evidently he did, so much so that Peter pulls Jesus aside and tries to rein him in. Perhaps when Jesus told Peter he would have the power to bind and loose, Peter thought that power extended to Jesus too.

Now I don’t think we can criticize Peter too severely for trying to soften or change Jesus’ narrative. First, here is the person he most loves in the whole world making crazy talk about persecution and dying. Second, this is not the way of the promised Messiah. Peter speaks out of fear and denial. Jesus replies with a phrase we know well, *“You are setting your mind not on divine things but on human ones.”*

It’s a good thing this is just the beginning of Jesus’ teaching and preparation of Peter and the other disciples for his Passion and the Resurrection. They are clearly not ready to hear and comprehend in this the 16th chapter of Matthew, nor will they be fully ready in the final chapters.

The disciples fatal case of humanness does not change the truth that Jesus speaks to them and to us, *“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.”* How are we to understand this today – gaining life by losing it?

Paul provides for the Christian communities in Rome, and for us, some insights on discipleship and life together. “Let love be genuine”, he says. He does not simply urge casual friendship or caring words, knowing that these can be faked. His meaning cannot be misunderstood, the words carefully chosen and employed for impact.

* Outdo one another in showing honor
* Do not lag in zeal
* Do not claim to be wiser than you are
* Be patient in suffering
* Persevere in prayer
* Bless those who persecute you
* Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly
* Never avenge yourselves

These are all practices that cannot be undertaken by persons consumed with the preoccupation of self. And they do take practice, a lot of practice, especially in a world that encourages us to be much the opposite – to toot our own horn, to hurry here and there, to avoid discomfort at all costs, and to applaud and emulate those personalities the world raises up as “famous”. It’s not simply about doing things for another but about a way of being with each other.

An understanding of living in genuine love, taking up the cross and following Christ, is what Richard Rohr offers when he says this; *“We must be liberated from ourselves as the reference point for reality.”* To lose our life means to set ourselves free to be part of a greater whole. Jesus does not promise safety and security in this life; in fact he promises the opposite. Being disciples opens us up to be vulnerable. If we pick up our cross and follow Christ, we must be willing to empty ourselves and to die to those things in our world and in our hearts that draw us from genuine love.

* When we love genuinely we will feel pain when others hurt.
* When we love genuinely, we will pray for those in trouble and we will reach out to help them.
* When we love genuinely, we will not hesitate to raise our voices against injustice, even as we risk being victims.
* When we love genuinely, we cry will when tragedy happens and we will rejoice when people and creatures are pulled from the floodwaters.

I like what Christian Missionary Heidi Baker says; *“I believe that Jesus would have given His life for just one person. Jesus emptied Himself, He humbled Himself and He so yielded Himself to His Father's love that He had no ambition of His own. He was not looking to build an empire, He did not want praise or adulation or to impress people with who or how many followed Him. He stopped over and over again for just one person, for just one life.”*

Last Sunday I sat in the congregation at my sending parish, Grace Church in Manchester. It occurred to me as I sat there that it would be the last time I would sit there as a layperson, just as I am here with you today, the last time I will be here with you as a layperson. As I approach the evening when I will be ordained Deacon in the Church, I wonder if I will feel different the day after. In many ways, nothing will have changed. I will remain, as I have been since my baptism as an infant, a Christian, and a member of the Episcopal branch of the Jesus movement. When I look at the words Bishop Rob will say during the Examination part of the ordination service I wonder if this is not the charge we all have, all of us here today, as we seek to love genuinely.

(Ordination of a Deacon – The Examination)

*As a deacon in the Church, you are to study the Holy Scriptures, to seek nourishment from them, and to model your life upon them. You are to make Christ and his redemptive love known, by your word and example, to those among whom you live, and work, and worship. You are to interpret to the Church the needs concerns, and hopes of the world……At all times, your life and teaching are to show Christ’s people that in serving the helpless they are serving Christ himself.* (BCP, 543)

Are we not called each day to renew our journey with Jesus? What difference will a day make? Will we be different? Perhaps. Will everything change? No and unequivocally YES! We will not know unless we take the first step toward Jerusalem. May we be open to a new destination and journey that is at the same time fully ours and fully God’s. In the connections we make, may we find promise and possibility and potential to be more than we were the day before.

There is a prayer that I pray each morning I would like to share with you. Let us pray…

God, I offer myself to Thee-

To build with me

and to do with me as Thou wilt.

Relieve me of the bondage of self,

that I may better do Thy will.

Take away my difficulties,

that victory over them may bear witness

to those I would help of Thy Power,

Thy Love, and Thy Way of life.

May I do Thy will always!

Amen.