

Sermon for Proper 8A
The Fourth Sunday After Pentecost
July 2, 2017
The Rev. Paul LeClair

Jeremiah 28:5-9 Psalm 89: 1-4, 15-18 Romans 6:12-23 Matthew 10:40-42

In the name of the Father who enlightens us,
and the Son who embraces us,
and the Spirit who empowers us. Amen

Whoever loves father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me ...

... take up the cross and follow me ...

... Those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

Jesus did not mince words when he taught his followers

how the road from sinner to saint is a rocky one.

The transition from brokenness to wholeness requires sacrifice.

As many of you know, my wife, Beth, is living thru' the difficult process of recovery after a bone marrow transplant.

The metamorphosis from cancer caterpillar to benign butterfly requires a challenging and scary period of isolation in a cocoon.

The procedures are not easy, but the hope for restored life, overpowers the fear.

The loneliness of isolation Beth and I have experienced has been overcome by the love and support we have received from this church community.

Yes, the pathway of change requires sacrifice, but we never walk that path alone.

~~~~

An on-line class I was taking recently included a conversation between The Rev. Chris Yaw, rector of St. David's in Southfield and Diana Butler Bass, a recent guest speaker for the Epiphanies Speakers Series here in our diocese.

At one point they discussed a question. Let's consider our answers. Ready?

Do we see church as a place that protects us from change?

or

Do we see the church as people who are on the cutting edge of change and of transformation?

The opening verses of today's gospel present a radical challenge to traditional beliefs and practices.

Those words led me to consider expanding my understanding of who we call mother and father.

For instance we could even include the word *Motherland* and the term *Fathers of Democracy*.

So, during this Independence Day holiday, I wonder,

“Are we inspired by singing patriotic songs and by celebrating the freedoms we enjoy in this country more than we are by hymns and liturgy that praise God for our many blessings and that humble us in our human struggles?”

Whatever our preference, patriotism or liturgy, it would be helpful for us to be aware of whether our fondness is motivated by our love of what is familiar or by our quest for transformation.

If we are seeking, as Jesus' disciples, to be agents of change in our broken world, and if we desire to be transformed from being imprisoned by our own personal sins to living more closely in line with Gods will, then we need to seriously considers Jesus' words when he said, "those who lose their life for my sake will find it. " Talk about major change; losing your life is at the top of the list of changes that we fear and resist!

~~~

In her memoir *Wedding Toasts I'll Never Give*, Ada Calhoun wrote the following passage about the life of a marriage.

Ada recalled when she and her husband, Neal, moved from their tiny city apartment, to a house in the country.

She wrote, "So now we own a house.

We bought furniture, framed pictures, and put up a badminton net.

We marveled at the change that had come over us.

Who were these backyard-grilling, property-tax-paying, people we had become?

"When we met in our 20s, Neal was NOT a man who would delight in lawn care, and I wasn't a woman who would find such a man appealing.

And yet here we were, avidly refilling our bird feeder and gazing at all the cardinals.

"Neal, who hadn't hammered a nail in all the years I'd known him, loved going to the hardware store.

He whistled while he mowed. He was like an alien.

But in this new situation, I was an alien, too –
one who knew when to plant bulbs and how to use a Crock-Pot.
Our alien selves were remarkably compatible.

"Several long-married people I know have said this exact line:
I've had at least three marriages. They've just all been with the same person.
I'd say Neal and I have had at least three marriages:
our partying 20s, child-centric 30s, and home-owning 40s."



40s? I think Ada will discover a few more changes coming her way.
Our lives do change over the years. The challenge is: to continue to grow,
to continue to love, to continue be there for one another as we change.
For change (and the growth that happens with it,)
the old self does need to die, so a new self can be born anew.
As Jesus says in today's Gospel, we find our true lives in the lives we "lose,"
we discover our true selves in the persons we become over time.
In God's wisdom and grace, we can transform the changes we see, as a "cross,"
into experiences of resurrection, where we discover
the love of God is in our midst.
When we "die to self" by making personal sacrifices
in order to respond to the needs of others,
we become the means for revealing God's love
to those we love, those who love us, and even to total strangers.
Part of allowing the old self to die and for the new self in Christ to grow,
is realizing when we are not acting for our own glory
but in the name of the one we know as Lord.



In the first half of today's Gospel selection, Jesus spoke frankly about the challenges of being a faithful disciple.

In the more encouraging second half, Jesus spoke about the reward that comes by welcoming in the name of a prophet, in the name of a righteous person or in the name of a disciple.

It got me to thinking about what it means to act in the name of someone.

I remember as a child playing cops and robbers we would yell,

"Stop in the name of the law!" not really knowing, then, what that meant.

Lately I've discovered that in London, England in 1829 the first police force was formed by Sir *Robert* Peel (and so, they were known as Bobbies).

When police officers approached a suspected criminal,

they could command them to stop by saying, "Stop in the name of the law."

If the person tried to run off he would be chased by the police officer

still shouting, "Stop in the name of the law," and blowing a warning whistle.

This racket often encouraged citizens to join the chase

and assist in capturing the suspect. Boy times have changed.

The phrase "Stop in the name of the law," meant that the Bobbies

were given the authority to stop, question, and apprehend people

on behalf of the local law enforcement agency.

Today, in legal documents and business transactions,

people are given the power to do something in someone else's name,

much like they were in the Hebrew, Greek, and Roman law of Jesus' time

and as they were in 19th century England.

In our liturgy, we also find several examples of how we are empowered

to act in the name of God.

Consider how often we hear a preacher begin a sermon by saying, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” In essence the preacher is saying, “What I am going to say to you, I do as an agent, or representative, of God.”

And when we say, “Amen,” in response, we’re affirming that we understand that to be so.

The healing prayers during communion, the priest’s blessing, and the sending of the visitation ministers, are other examples of ways that we act not by our own power, but by the authority given to us, by God in Christ.

Let’s also consider ways any of us can welcome in the name of a prophet and serve in the name of a disciple.

For more than fifty years, Nurney Mason was a barber who cut hair for members of the U.S. House of Representatives.

Every day, he brought not only his barbering skills to his job, but also kindness, optimism and encouragement.

He would greet everyone with a solid handshake and a knowing smile, no matter if they were a powerful Congressman or lowest-level staffer, Mr. Mason stayed upbeat, day after day.

His clippers trimmed scruffy hair and his personality lifted weary spirits.

When asked by one of his customers how he stayed so happy all the time, Nurney Mason replied simply, "I just make it right here.

I create joy where I stand."

Nurney Mason possessed that same heart and soul of the welcoming prophet that Jesus commended in today's Gospel.

As this kind of prophet, we too, can respond to God's call
To create joy where we stand, and to reveal God's compassion and peace
right here, wherever we live and work and play.
Whenever we use the gifts God has given us,
And when we make the love of God a living reality in the lives we touch,
we are serving in the name of a disciple.

So, after Linda dismisses us at the end of today's service to love and serve the Lord,
let's remember that what we do in the coming week, we do in the name of God.
We act in the tradition of the apostles and saints who lived and served before us.
And we speak, serve, heal, and touch lives, by the authority given to us by Jesus.
May we always be mindful that all the things we do to usher in God's Kingdom,
we do in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Sources:

The New Interpreters Study Bible, NRSV with Apocrypha, Abington Press, Nashville, 2003

Wedding Toasts I'll Never Give, Ada Calhoun, 2017, W.W. Norton and Co, New York

Stop in the name of the law, WordReference.com

The President's Devotional: The Daily Readings That Inspired President Obama, Joshua DuBois, 2013,
Harper Collins Publishers, New York

Connections, July 2017, MediaWorks, Londonderry, N.H.