

Sermon for the 17th Sunday after Pentecost

Proper 19

September 16, 2018

Barbara Marshall

Isaiah 50:4-9a

James 3:1-12

Psalms 116:1-8

Mark 8:27-38

The privilege of discipleship is to take up your cross and follow Jesus.

In today's Gospel story, Jesus calls together the crowds along with his disciples to teach them what following a suffering Messiah really means. In Greek, Messiah is Christos, the anointed one, a title. The disciples misunderstood because they weren't expecting a Messiah that would have to suffer.

The cross is a horrific instrument used by the Romans and other authorities for executions. It was something to be feared. The authorities wanted to oppress those seeking the truth. However, over a period of time we have come to learn that it is a privilege of discipleship to take up our cross and to follow Jesus.

Frances Perkins took up her cross and found her vocation when the worst industrial disaster in American History occurred on March 25, 1911.

A fire destroyed the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in Manhattan. Crowds watched in horror as the fire raced through the building, killing 145 workers, many of them jumping to their deaths from the eighth, ninth and tenth floors. Triangle was a sweatshop, employing young immigrant women who worked in a cramped space at lines of sewing machines; they worked 12 hours a day for a mere \$15 a week.

Frances Perkins, a 31 year-old wife and mother from an upper-class family was having tea with friends nearby when the fire broke out. She and her friends ran to the scene.

Prior to the fire, Frances lobbied for worker rights on behalf of the poor. After the fire, what had been a career turned into a vocation. Her own desires and her own self became less central and the cause itself became more central to the structure of her life. The niceties of her class fell away. She became impatient with the way progressives went about serving the

poor. She threw herself into the rough and tumble arena of politics. She became willing to take whatever hazardous action was needed to prevent another catastrophe like the one that befell the women of the Triangle factory. She was willing to compromise and work with corrupt officials if it would produce results. She devoted herself to this cause for the rest of her life.

She spent the next 20 years securing workers' rights and safety. In 1931, she became Secretary of the Labor in President Franklin Roosevelt's administration – the first woman to serve as a U.S. cabinet secretary. She was a major force behind such initiatives as Social Security and the Fair Labor Standards Act, establishing the first minimum wage law and first overtime law.

The timid young woman, who lived in the insular world of New York society, who endured the hardship of the mental illnesses of her husband and daughter, who suffered the humiliation inherent in being a woman in the male-dominated politics of her time, lived a life of humble service to a vocation. Frances Perkins heard the discipleship call of God in the plight of poor and abused workers and took on "her" cross in the spirit of Jesus.

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In the early 1980's, many parents were concerned about the influence rock musician Prince was having on teenagers. With his provocative clothing and explicit lyrics of his songs, people asked if anything good could come out of a strange young man from Minneapolis. (Sounds a bit like Nathanael asking Philip if anything good could come out of Nazareth over 2000 years ago.)

But there was more to Prince than outrageous antics. Those who took the time to wade through the strange costumes found a man deeply devoted to Jesus Christ. While Prince wrote many songs about romance and sex, he also wrote many songs about God. In fact, the B-side to "Purple Rain" was a song called "God," which was explicit in a different way – explicitly religious.

Many people thought nothing good could come out of Prince. Just like people thought nothing good could come out of Nazareth. They were wrong and doubted God's power to bless the world with unlikely people. But really, that's all God ever does.

Jesus is calling. He is calling and blessing you and me. Jesus isn't calling us to deny ourselves certain luxuries or bad habits, but to deny out perceived right to direct our own lives. We are to renounce ownership of ourselves, and submit unswervingly to God's will. We are to take up our own crosses in the everyday joys and sorrows we live in our homes, parish, schools and communities. This can bring opposition. But whatever the cost, Jesus calls us to say "no" to self and "yes" to God.

Starting next Sunday and on into one Sunday for each of the next 3 months, we will continue discernment a little more formally. During those Sundays we will have a shortened Eucharist Service providing time for an extended interactive sermon.

- On September 23<sup>rd</sup> the topic will be Me and Jesus.
- On October 21, Me as a Disciple
- November 11<sup>th</sup>, My Gifts
- December 9<sup>th</sup>, My Ministry.

As a Total Ministry Church, discernment is ongoing. The topic is often mentioned in sermons. It is discernment that brought three new interns - Tina, Dina, and Lois onto the Ministry Support Team a few months ago. It is discernment that led to Marlene's official integration onto the team by Bishop Gibbs last Sunday. Dan began exploring his Spiritual Journey through a class offered by Whitaker School of Theology in August of this year.

Last Sunday, we recognized all the many ministry roles each of you have discerned over the past few years that make St. Patrick's a successful Total Ministry Church. We are ordinary people living extraordinary lives. It is with a spirit of enthusiasm that we will continue on as Jesus disciples. May He give us strength to follow and grow as we continue discerning and using our discipleship roles here at church, in our communities, and in the world. Amen!

Resources for this sermon:  
Forward Day by Day for August 9, 2018  
Connections for August 2018  
The New International Study Bible – RSV  
Commentary on Mark from Intervarsity Ministries