

“How to accept and be a part of God’s Plan” by Ted Krohn August 31

Good Morning, it’s good to be back here at our worship service at First Presbyterian Church. Last time I believe I was giving the sermon I’d prepared for March 21 on April 18, time can move in strange ways when you’re dealing with someone like Jesus. And here we are again, so many weeks after Easter, if I really was a pastor I could probably tell you how many Sundays but let’s just say it’s been a few. Since one’s place in the space time continuum is trivial to a deity we find ourselves here in the first reading listening in to the first time Jesus predicts his death, something that, I think, comes with no spoilers to us. With the gift of 2000 years of hindsight and a trusty copy of the Bible at hand we share in Jesus’ knowledge of what’s to come. But to the disciples this appears out of the blue. Here they have been enjoying Jesus’ ministry on Earth, listening to parables, accepting him as the Messiah, learning to feed thousands on a budget and walking on water. In general having a great time. And suddenly on a, lets just call it a Tuesday, in the midst of so much enlightenment and miracles Jesus sits them down and says that he will be dying soon, and not from some tragic accident or heroic feat but by torture and execution. Whoa...way to kill the vibe man. So who should raise his hand to interject, our old friend, and audience stand-in, Peter.

Peter is the disciple we get to know the best in the gospels and for my money he has the greatest character arc in the bible. Peter goes from being a weathered fisherman, hardened by the toil of the physical world to Jesus’ most devoted disciple. Peter is the questioner and the overthinker, always ready to raise his doubts. He isn’t willing to just go with the flow and swallow everything Jesus has to say hook, line and sinker. No it takes time for Peter to make up his mind. I count myself as a questioner and an overthinker, never quite willing to take things at face value, sometimes even overthinking often simple things, the dreaded question, where should we go to dinner, to the point of exhaustion for myself and those around me. Now, in my experience, once we questioners and overthinkers have been won over by the argument and make up our mind we are quick to become the most devoted followers to

a person or idea. Ready to set into motion our plans to achieve the best outcome for these accepted beliefs or individuals.

Plans. I don't know if it's a blessing or a curse that we humans are so good at planning...oh wait a sec, that was a typo. It should read I don't know if it's a blessing or a curse that we humans are so obsessed with planning. There we go. Sure other animals in nature exhibit planning in hunting techniques and shelter constructions, obviously a beaver can't build a dam without a plan. But at least in our experience we humans have the ability to project our plans out into the future. Sometimes far into the future...ok is Dottie getting enough STEM activity, or should we be encouraging her creative side, but maybe she should be free to choose, oh how will we know if she'll be a good person, are we doing enough. etc. etc. etc. It goes on and on. It's easy to imagine Peter himself, now that he has accepted Jesus as the messiah, building up inside his head the best laid plan to help Jesus come into his kingdom. But for all our perceived plans for the future; what happens when life turns on a dime. Lets return to our first reading.

The bible calls these verses Matthew Chapter 16 but for Peter it's just Tuesday. He's just going through his day to day, trying to decipher what exactly, Jesus was going on earlier in this chapter talking about yeast and the pharisees. I'll admit, if I was making a greatest parable hits album this one might not make the cut, but I could be wrong. Anyway, he's also feeling pretty good about himself since the man whom he has accepted as his Lord and Savior just told him that he, Peter, is the rock upon which his church will be founded upon. Pretty good for a Tuesday. It's nice to have a good day for a change. And then in the next breath his Savior is sharing that he will soon be tortured and put to death.

And so on this Tuesday, as the disciples gather around the first century equivalent of a conference table, maybe a fig tree and a mound of dirt, to discuss Jesus' latest teachings. The newly named Rock and quite proud of himself; Peter, raises a legitimate concern. How can being tortured and put to death possibly be part of the plan. Shouldn't we try to workshop this or maybe

form a committee to determine the most desirable outcomes, you can almost hear Peter suggest.

But no, Jesus comes down hard, in a way that nowadays would get him sent to HR to discuss more appropriate techniques of sharing and resolving differences with our co-workers, I mean team-mates. Jesus' doesn't have time for corporate speak and so moments after praising Peter, his rock, he rebukes him. "Get behind me Satan!" Now, as I have gotten to know the Bible and especially this gospel I have come to recognize that Jesus, rarely gets mad. But when He does it's time to pay especially close attention. And here is no different. 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.' Talk about whiplash, going from the Rock to build a church on to the stone you stub the Savior's toe on. But Jesus' is not using his anger just to curse Peter but to empathized his point. While meaning well and wanting to lay out the best plan for Jesus Peter is human just like us and while we are created in God's image we are still bound to the physical world and our experience is limited. There are things we cannot understand, sometimes the plan won't make sense and even can't make sense. This is a difficult pill to swallow. What happens when things don't go according to the plan?

Often this happens in life, we've gone over it before, this is not a perfect world. Sometimes you stub your toe. That was never part of the plan, but it's easy to let something like that go. We will persist, throbbing pain or not. But sometimes it's bigger than that. For Peter it's being told that the person he has built up to be not just his personal savior but the savior of his people.

Remember this whole ragged band of brothers that makes up Jesus and his disciples are Jews; and they are living in an occupied country. They are being governed by the Romans, not by choice and all of the disciples want to break their people free. And now this person is saying his life will end shortly in the worst manner possible. All of their built up plans will come to nothing. Think of the stomach punch that must have been. How do Peter and the disciples deal with that? My stomach punch came last year when I was told my mother, who'd been a relatively healthy 67 year had only a couple years at best, to live.

Then 5 months later she was gone. That was certainly not part of the plan. What do I do now. To be honest I still haven't really made sense of it. She was such a dedicated Grandma, the plan was for her to be an intricate part of her grandchildren's lives, to see them grow up and to help me. Well, that's not going to happen. That plan isn't going to work. Now what. Thankfully for us Jesus continues:

'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

When I first came across this passage preparing for today the summary for these verses jumped out. The cross and self-denial. The cross is pretty self-explanatory but then Self Denial, hey now. I'm the King of denial. Finally a passage from the Bible where you will find no other more qualified expert than me. Denial is what I'm good at. In fact, if I'm being honest, my first reaction when told my mother's prognosis was to shrug, embrace the denial and quote the 90's slacker sage and say "oh well, whatever, nevermind" That's one way to deal with bad news about a plan not working out, but this isn't what Jesus is talking about, it's not self-denial its denying one's self. Jesus continues:

For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. "

Now after saying this I imagine most of the disciples holding their chins in ponderment and maybe a few of the twelve are nodding along like they understand the words, while they're really thinking whether or not fish will be on the menu again. It can be hard to always follow along closely to a sermon, I know I know. But if I'm going to take a crack at it I think Jesus is saying that at a certain point we need to surrender to the fact that we are just humans and that our understanding only goes so far. I used to think surrender was a bad word akin to giving up. But often surrender is an act of courage. Accepting in the face of overwhelming odds that one must turn their fate over to another in hopes of mercy. That with all of our attempts at human planning maybe there is a divine plan that we just have to accept.

So there; that's the answer. Surrender to God and let His will be done. On earth as it is in heaven. Words we say every Sunday. But here's the rub, are words enough. Now that we've surrendered the future to God can we leave here today singing, Que Sara, Sara. Whatever will be will be. The future's not ours to see, Que Sara, sara. Sure that will put a smile on our face as we walk out but will it last till Tuesday, when we're back to our day to day.

No words are not enough, there must be action...at this point, you might be wondering...did he forget about the second reading? Isn't there always a second reading, sure Ted's trying his best but how could he forget the second bible passage? Well friends I didn't forget and now we come to it.

How do we live out our day to day when our plans don't go our way? How do we live a life that surrenders to God's will? Well thankfully another character from the bible appears. Our old friend, or maybe frenemy, I missed out on the what's the deal about Paul bible study to condense and distill all the teachings Jesus gave to us for just this very purpose. in his letter to the Romans.

Here it is Romans 9-21:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰ love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. ¹¹ Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. ^[e] ¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; ^[f] do not claim to be wiser than you are. ¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; ^[g] for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' ²⁰ No, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give

them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.’²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

I couldn’t say it better myself. Amen