

You're Not in the Driver's Seat
August 28, 2011 8:30, 9:16, 10:30a.m.
First Presbyterian Church

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Text: Matthew 16:21-26
Lancaster, PA

Introduction

I like to drive. Whenever I travel most places, I like to be the person in the driver's seat. You have the best view, you can decide the route to take, and how fast or slow you want to go. You are in control. Is there anyone else here who likes to be in control? When someone else is driving it can be an unpleasant experience. They may drive too fast or too slow. They may go a way you are not familiar with and you know a better way. You are at the mercy of this other driver.

In our passage today, Jesus and Peter get into an argument about who is going to drive. Let's see what happens.

Text: Matthew 16:21-26 (The Message) You're Not in the Driver's Seat

21-22Then Jesus made it clear to his disciples that it was now necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, submit to an ordeal of suffering at the hands of the religious leaders, be killed, and then on the third day be raised up alive. Peter took him in hand, protesting, "Impossible, Master! That can never be!" **23**But Jesus didn't swerve. "Peter, get out of my way. Satan, get lost. You have no idea how God works." **24-26**Then Jesus went to work on his disciples. "Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat; I am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to finding yourself, your true self. What kind of deal is it to get everything you want but lose yourself? What could you ever trade your soul for?"

Background

By this time in the life and ministry of Jesus, things are pretty far along. He has preached all through Galilee, made guest appearances in Jerusalem, and finished a healing and teaching tour through the northern regions of Phoenicia. He is now with this disciples in the city of Caesarea Philippi (which is just south of Syria and Mt. Hermon). They are processing their recent experiences.

- Large crowds gathered and were taught, healed, and fed by Jesus.
- Religious rulers are demanding proof from Jesus that he is from God, while missing the miracles occurring all around them.
- Rumors were spreading who Jesus might be and many wanted to make him King.

In the midst of all this, Jesus warns his disciples against people who look and talk religious, but who do not listen to God. Now Jesus is preparing his disciples for what is about to come.

The road less travelled

As Jesus is sitting there with his band of disciples, he explains to them that their next journey will be different than they think. Jesus says in effect, **“Yes, you are going to Jerusalem to confront the evil powers and principalities. Yes, you are going to see God work in even in more powerful ways than you can imagine. However, it is all going to unfold in ways that will be terrifying for you. I will be arrested by the religious leaders, suffer beatings, and be killed. On the third day, though, I will be raised to life.”** It is probably safe to say the disciples did not understand what Jesus was talking about. They did not have a pocket to put this in. This was so foreign to their thinking that a shocked Peter pulls Jesus aside to talk him out of this. The New International Version reads, **“This shall never happen to you!”²³ Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”**

In the first reading you get the sense that Jesus is calling Peter “Satan.” In the paragraph previous to this section, Peter is the one who declares Jesus at the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of living God. Jesus affirms this confession as the truth that will set all people free.

- *When you and I recognized and embrace Jesus as the one sent from God to save us, we become free.*
- *We enter into a new way of living.*
- *We allow God’s love, forgiveness, and power to flow in us.*
- *Day by day we become transformed into that “all-inclusive community of loving persons with God himself at the very center of this community as its prime Sustainer and most glorious Inhabitant” (Renovare’ Bible, pg.717).*

So is Peter the most enlightened disciple one moment and Satan himself in the next? I favor the way the Message Bible translates this passage. It reads: **Peter took him in hand, protesting, “Impossible, Master! That can never be!” But Jesus didn't swerve. “Peter, get out of my way. Satan, get lost. You have no idea how God works.”**

I think Peter is reacting out of fear and concern for Jesus. His intentions are good. He wants to help Jesus. His plan, however, is misguided and tragic if adopted. If Jesus bypasses the suffering and the cross, then you and I and the whole of humanity are trapped in our sin. There would be no Savior, no cancelling out of our debt. There would be no forgiveness. The gulf between a Holy God and a world of evil-infested people would remain. Bad idea, Peter. We need saving from ourselves and our self-destructive habits. That is why Jesus says: **“Peter, get out of my way. Satan, get lost. You have no idea how God works.”**

You and I may have good ideas that may not be God’s ideas. Peter thought running from the Cross was a good idea. That was not God’s plan.

- Some people think in these financially hard time by hoarding their resources they will be protected and made safe from all harm. Jesus calls you and me to live generously in tough times and to bless as many people as possible.
- You and I may have thoughts each day we think are good. We have to be careful. In Proverbs 12:15 it says, *“The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice.”* And in Proverbs 14:12 we are cautioned, *“There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.”*

Jesus turns his disciples on their heels by saying: *“Anyone who intends to come with me **has to let me lead.** You're not in the driver's seat; I am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to finding yourself, your true self. What kind of deal is it to get everything you want but lose yourself? What could you ever trade your soul for?”*

How do we let God lead?

There comes a point in the life of every person when he or she will have to decide, “Who is going to drive my life?

- Will it be me?
- Will it be my friends or spouse?
- Will it be my job?
- Will it be my quest for more money, power, or recognition?
- Will anger, bitterness, or fear drive my life?
- Or will I invite Jesus to drive my life?

You and I will have to decide today and everyday who or what will drive our lives. I commend to you the way of Jesus. Jesus is Lord and the one who sits in the driver’s seat. You and I as followers of Jesus sit next to him. We do not get in the backseat and fall asleep. We do not drive from the back seat either. As people responsive to the Word and Spirit of God we sit attentive to the leading of Jesus. We take our cues daily from God.

Steps in following Jesus

1. Practically that means we wake up listening to Jesus. We do not ask ourselves, “What do I want to do today?” Rather the question is “God, what are you doing today that you want me to join you in?” You and I will probably not know how we are to serve God each day if we are not asking! So let’s ask, “God, what do you want to do today?”

- It may be to go and talk to a neighbor you have been wondering about but have not seen.
- It may be writing a check to a person or cause you know that needs the money. God will guide you and me.

- You will get a certain feeling. You will read a Bible passage or devotional book that will seem to stick out like it is meant for you. God speaks in lots of ways when we are listening. I recommend the practice of silence. Just sit quietly for ten minutes and invite God to join you. You will be surprised how much God can express to us in silence.

Exploring Contemplative Prayer

A resource we are making available this year is a web course by Tracey Marx called [Exploring Contemplative Prayer: A Nine Month Journey to the Quiet](#). This course will help you experience and reflect on eight different prayer practices. Not all of the prayer practices would be considered contemplative in the classic sense. But they are all ways to pray that take us outside the usual, more conversational approach to prayer, where we do much, if not all, of the talking.

The journey begins in September on the 1st of each month, from September 2011 to May 2012, you will receive an introductory email and online access to a copy-ready PDF document that contains: 1) a Welcome Letter; 2) Background (History & Theology) of the Prayer Practice; 3) a Step-by-Step Guide for Experiencing the Prayer Practice; 4) Suggestions for Exploring the Prayer Practice; and 5) a Journal for that Month.

The Schedule of topics include: September: Preparing for Prayer; October: Breath Prayer; November: Lectio Divina; December: Release Prayer; January: The Prayer of Examen; February: Contemplative Healing Prayer; March: Praying with Icons & Images; April: Centering Prayer; and May: Silent Prayer.

When I first started learning about this type of prayer, *“I have a hard time sitting still. If I have to sit and pray very long, forget it!”* That is how I felt until I was introduced to contemplative prayer by Tracey Marx and Bob Webber. This course will guide you into a wonderful world of spiritual practices that help us slow down, relax at the feet of God, and absorb the love, grace, and wisdom that are waiting for us there. If you would like to sign just send your name and email address to sarah@fpclanc.org or call Sarah at the church office and let her know you are interested.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, sometimes it takes stock market fluctuations, an earthquake, or a hurricane to make us realize that we are not in control. We thank you that you are in control. We thank you for your deep and ever-persistent love for each one of us. We are humbled by your love and thankful for your forgiveness and care in our lives. Help us move over and let you drive today and in the days to follow. You have important work to do on earth. Please work in and through us to love the world. In Jesus' Name we pray, Amen.