

Twelfth after Pentecost
August 31, 2014
Barrhaven United Church

Exodus 3: 1-15
Matthew 16: 21-28

The Rev. Suzanne E. Sykes
bucedu.min@gmail.com

Demanding Insights

You have to feel a little sorry for Peter. Last week he is the hero. He gets it right. He knows who Jesus really is - the Anointed, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. And Jesus congratulates him for his insight. This week the exact opposite. Jesus calls him a Satan - an adversary - and tells him to get behind him where he cannot interfere. And why? Because Peter cannot believe that Jesus, his hero, his friend and guide, will have to die. Surely not, Peter says. Surely yes. For if Peter, like Jesus and like us, is not willing to take up his cross and follow, then he is not worthy to be Jesus friend.

Now, I have to confess two things about this passage. First, I don't Jesus could see, predict or control events in the future. I think he had lived long enough and seen enough that he know the logical outcome of continued, niggling, persistent defiance of Roman rule was certain death.

Second, I don't think Jesus' death was God's plan. I think God is always luring all of creation to the greatest abundance and beauty possible in every moment of existence, and, I think that God redeems even the worst things imaginable. And by redeem I mean God finds something in it that God can turn into an opportunity to create good and give it back to us to work with in the next moment of existence. Redemption is continuous, everlasting (or eternal).

Then there's Moses. He's fled Egypt and made a new life for himself in Midian. He's married. The pharaoh's child, raised to rule in Egypt, thinks he's settled down; has settled, for a nomadic life, herding his father-in-law's flocks.

Suddenly his quiet life is disrupted by a vision and a voice. God sends him on a task - a task which in its own way is Moses' cross. If he's not willing to pick up this task and carry it, if he's not willing to become the deliverer of his people, then he's not worthy to be called a child of Israel.

Two moments of clarity and insight. Two vivid accounts of the revelation of God's self to an ordinary individual. Two stories where God calls these individuals to a task and where their first response is no - no way, not me.

Two stories that illustrate Paul's challenge of being metamorphosed - continually transformed - by the renewing of our minds, into becoming a more transparent window into the nature and desires of God.

It's a tough job. I think they were right to have misgivings. Perhaps even right to resist. It shows that they knew what they were up against.

All of us, like Peter and Moses, are traveling the *via transformativa*, this path of metamorphosis, of continual transformation. All of us are here because at some point we had an insight. All of us see the world and live in the world differently because, like them, we have glimpsed the transcendent, the divine, present within it.

Seeing though, isn't enough. The transcendent is never neutral. It makes demands. Peter had to become the rock that Jesus called him - an unsafe risk - and become a window into God for others just as Jesus is for him. Taking up his cross is doing whatever is necessary to, in Paul's words, continually renewing your mind and transforming yourself in order to become transparent to the nature of God for others.

Moses has to do the same thing. He has to become a window for his people into God's compassionate nature so when they see him they know that God has not abandoned them. It's a risky task - to return to Egypt to the very household of Pharaoh. Nevertheless, he is called to be transformed and transforming, to become a window for others, just as the burning bush was a window for him.

The *via transformativa* - the way of transformation is the path of challenge. And the curious thing about it is it chooses us before we choose it. Peter was committed to walking this path as soon as he met Jesus and long before he realized it. Moses was committed to this path when Pharaoh's daughter brought him out of the river and took him as her son. He was committed to being the redeemer of his people long before he knew it.

Like them we too are on the path of transformation long before we realize it. Through baptism, confirmation, an insight, a conviction that an injustice "cannot continue," whenever it was, it was that moment that started us down this path and this journey.

God envisions a life together in terms that are vastly different from those which Christian culture has agreed to settle for. Hard work, thrift, a day's pay for a day's work, competition in the marketplace - all these market values, admirable as they may be, are not the building blocks Jesus imagined as the foundation of human life together.

Love, care, mutual nurture of one another, mercy, redemption of the lost - these are the values that Jesus claimed as ultimate values. Human relationships, if they are to be fully

authentic, fully grounded in what is real and true must be grounded in these values. It is living this out in our everyday relationships - in families, neighbourhoods, even in church - that makes up our cross and forms the path of the ***via transformativa***. It is living this out everyday that we become a window into the lure of God for goodness and beauty for others.

A religious community is a place where we have promised to follow the dream of God. It is a place where we create, re-create and continually transform ourselves and our world into the image of the one who carried the cross. We live to reveal the dream of God to others without expectation of reward. We live to deepen spirituality and religious sensibility in ourselves and others, so as to create more goodness and beauty in the world and greater well-being in all of creation.

From the rock and the burning bush to becoming an increasingly clear window for others into the nature of our boundless, compassionate God who continually lures us into relationship with God's self, with each other and all of creation. That is our calling, and our cross.

Amen.

c. 2014, Rev. Suzanne E. Sykes