

## What Was He Thinking?

Proper 17, Year A – Matthew 16:21-26

preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, August 31, 2014

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

I've confessed before that I watch entirely too much television. I've got my favorite programs: *America's Got Talent*, *Criminal Minds*, *Big Bang Theory*. But sometimes, the commercials can be even better. My current favorite, an ad for a travel service, cracks me up to out-loud laughter every time with the same line: "His *shoes*."

Anyway, this week doing my reading, I was reminded of another one from a few years ago that was my favorite for a long time. In it we see an adventurer enjoying the rugged outdoors, madly paddling a kayak down a swollen, white-water river. He skillfully navigates around the rocks, splashing up over one wave and through the next. As the camera begins to pull back we see that the goal toward which this rugged outdoorsman is paddling is a particularly challenging part of the river – no, it's a class-5 run of rapids – no, it's a *waterfall* of *monumental* proportions. As the camera continues to pull back to chronicle the man's screaming plummet over the edge, we see a young couple standing next to their shiny new, hybrid fueled, roomy enough for their retriever and, we're sure, future two-and-a-half kids, but environmentally friendly, go-anywhere sport utility vehicle, safely parked at a scenic overlook in the foreground. As the adventurer enjoys the great outdoors by crashing, still screaming, into the foaming mists that obscure the bottom of the falls, the couple turns to continue *their* adventure, as the fellow shakes his head and mutters, "What was he thinking?"

That's got to be the same question Peter asks about Jesus in this morning's Gospel lesson. In our Gospel last week, Jesus had asked his disciples who the people were saying he was – and who *they* said that he was. Peter had finally responded, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God." Then, no sooner has he clued them in on the whole magnificent *good* news, than he begins to tell them the *bad* news. Peter is understandably taken aback. What gives, here? What was Jesus thinking going up to Jerusalem, when he knows what waited for him there. Not because he was the Son of God – but because *everyone* knew what waited for him there. Even the hot-blooded, shout-before-you-think, fisherman, Peter knew what waited in *Jerusalem* for a prophet who had dared to challenge the *status quo* and had called the leaders to accounts. At *best* Jerusalem held ridicule and punishment and imprisonment. More *probably* Jerusalem held death and obscurity. And yet that's *exactly* where Jesus was heading.

What was he thinking when he missed his chance to recruit the five thousand that he fed for a march on Jerusalem to shake off the yoke of their oppressors and establish a new kingdom? That sort of bread and bullets revolution is what so many had done before, and what so many have done since. Instead Jesus sat them down and he preached to them about a new kingdom *of God*, where the peacemakers are blessed above the warriors, where the meek are blessed above the mighty, where the poor in spirit are blessed above the rich of this world.

What was he thinking when he traded the cries of "Hossana!" and the waving palm branches for the shouts of "Crucify him!" and the hard wood of the cross? If there ever was a perfect chance to upset the cart, to turn the tables, surely it was here in the Passover-crowded streets, thousands and thousands shouting and throwing their own cloaks in road for his procession. And *instead* of accepting the jubilant accolades, Jesus slinks off to have a last meal with his friends and prays in a garden alone until they come for him with clubs and swords and a traitor.

What was he thinking when he hung there, bleeding and dying? What was he thinking when his thirst was quenched only by his own sweat and blood and tears? What was he thinking when he was forsaken even by the Lord of Heaven?

What was he *thinking*? He was thinking of me. And he was thinking of you. He was thinking of those five thousand on the hillside. He was thinking of the twelve that were his companions. He was thinking of Peter who got it one moment, and missed it the next. He was thinking of each and every one of us, and the absolute fact that *without* the cross, we would have no chance at all of understanding the infinite love of God for *us*.

What was he thinking? He was thinking of you, and he was thinking of me. From the beginning of beginning, when he set the planets and the stars in the heavens, when he caused life to spring from lifelessness, and when out of love alone, he made creatures capable of loving him in return – *or* turning our backs – from the beginning of beginning, he was thinking of you, and he was thinking of me. When he set aside the glories of heaven and took on himself *our* nature, when he came *here*, to walk *our* walk, and to talk *our* talk, when he became one of us, to feel *our* pain and to suffer *our* sorrows, he was thinking of you, and he was thinking of me. When he hung on that cross, bruised and bleeding and dying, and watched the world and heaven turn away, he was thinking of you, and he was thinking of me. And, friends, three days later, when he burst forth from his borrowed grave, three days later, when death could no longer hold the author of life, three days later, when the Christ shattered *forever* the power of sin and death to keep *us* from the glories that he has in store, he was thinking of *you*, and he was thinking of me!

What was he thinking? When he told Peter and the others that if they wanted to be part of his mission of love, if they wanted to truly belong to him, they must take up their own cross and follow him? He was thinking of you, and he was thinking of me. Like Peter, each of us who claims to be a Christian, a follower of Christ, each of us has a calling, some cross that we are called to bear in his name. Like Peter, we have been called to join *in* the love that saved the world. Like Peter, we have been sent out to be a *part* of the love that saves the world still today. Sometimes like Peter, we turn away from the Cross of Calvary to the cross we have before us and we ask, why me? Why this? Why now? But if we are to go from watching the world go by from some safe scenic overlook, if we are to be *transformed* from being casual *observers* of Christ to being his *disciples*, then we must take up our cross and follow in the way where Christ himself has led. If we are to respond to the one who from before time began, through the cross and the grave, bursting forth in resurrection, and day by day, moment by moment, has, and does, and ever *will* love us beyond time or reason or measure, then we must take up our cross and follow *him*.

What was he thinking? He was thinking of me. And he was thinking of you.