

In the name of God, Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit.

“This isn’t what I signed up for.”

In today’s Gospel reading, this is basically what we hear Peter saying to Jesus.

In this passage, Jesus tells his disciples of the fate that awaits him on the cross. Jesus informs them that he will have to go through great suffering. He describes the rejection he will face by some of the most respected and powerful people of the day. He predicts his death.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Peter is upset and angry. This is not what Peter or Jesus’ disciples want to hear. They have disrupted their lives to follow this man. They have lived a tough life on the road. They have given up a lot. They aren’t interested in his suffering. They are interested in a victory. They aren’t interested in life after death, they want a new kind of life here and now. They don’t want a weak and overpowered Messiah, they want a new kind of King, one who can stand up to the Roman empire, who can take control, who can change their lives for the better.

The Jesus in today’s Gospel is not the Jesus they want.

In short, this is not what they signed up for.

I have talked over the last month with a number of people from St. John’s who are wrestling with a different version of this same sentiment. As we think about Christianity today and about the history of violence and oppression carried out in its name, many of us seem to be saying, “This isn’t what I signed up for.”

Some of us are part of the Sacred Ground series and are digging deep into the ways in which the Anglican church supported and benefitted from the transatlantic slave trade. We’re learning about the Doctrine of Discovery that provided European Christians with a tool for justifying colonization and the seizure of land, leading to centuries of violence and oppression against indigenous people. We know these things are the foundation upon which racist systems and structures still in place today are built.

Others of us watched the events at the Capitol unfold on January 6<sup>th</sup> and saw how many of those perpetrating the violence did so in the name of the Christian religion. We watched as Christian symbols were paraded into the Capitol building, just feet away from where people were being chased, terrorized, beaten, and killed.

As we learn this history, and as we watch the events at the Capitol, many of us may feel, like Peter, that this is not what we signed up for. That this history is not one we want to have to grapple with. That is significant expression of Christian faith in this country is not the religion we want to be associated with.

I often find myself in this place. I find myself telling people that I’m on a path towards ordination, and then I hear myself stumbling to explain exactly what KIND of a Christian I am. I rush to mention my politics, or to assure a friend or acquaintance that I’m an Episcopalian and believe in “reason” as well as Scripture. I find myself adding asterisk after asterisk to my “Christian” label. Or, occasionally, I find myself considering what it would look like to simply walk away. On some days, the painful truth of our past and the harsh reality I see in the newspaper feel like too much to handle.

Some days, it just feels like this isn't what I signed up for.

In these moments, Jesus' rebuke of Peter rings in my ears. "Get behind me, Satan," he tells his disciple. This is strong language. Jesus does not mince words. He seems to be angry that Peter is questioning him. He seems to chastise Peter for doubting his leadership.

But, as I continue to examine the text, I start to wonder about something else.

What if Jesus' intense reaction is his way of getting Peter's attention on what he sees as most important in the life of his disciples?

Immediately after this forceful rebuke, Jesus instructs his disciples to take up their cross. To follow him. To set their minds on divine things.

And, after getting Peter's attention with his sharp words, Jesus also tells Peter not to give up. What Peter anticipated and wanted isn't happening. Jesus is not a new Emperor. He is not raising a new army. But that does not mean Peter should give up hope. Jesus is telling Peter that something bigger, greater, and more profound than he could have ever imagined is on the horizon.

And in today's world, in this moment, we too are being called to follow Jesus. And we, too, are being called not to give up hope.

We are called to follow Jesus by facing the truth of our racial history as a church and a nation in a new way. To learn about both the great brutality and racism perpetrated by Christians AND about acts of courage, love, and grace by followers of the way of Jesus. And by exploring the past, by hearing stories, by claiming our own family histories we can begin to participate in the future God wants to create through us. A future of love and justice, a future where all of creation can flourish.

We are called to follow Jesus not by turning away from but rather by examining the parts of our Christian faith that are used to justify violence and extremism in our country. To look at the ways in which we benefit from those parts of our religious tradition. And by shining a light on those parts of our faith, we can begin take responsibility for saying "no" to the ways that Christianity and violence are wed together and "yes" to a faith rooted in God's peace, justice, and liberation.

We are called to follow Jesus not by turning away from our faith, but rather by exploring the ways in which it offers us the path forward to a more just and loving world. And by claiming what we see to be the Good News of our faith, by running towards God, towards Jesus, towards a vision of justice, love, and mercy, we can be part of building, with God, the kind of community we believe Jesus calls us to.

This Lent, a time of self-examination, we are asked to live into the FULL message of today's Gospel. To commit to an examination of our history. To think seriously and talk with each other about what we can learn, as Christians, from the events of January 6<sup>th</sup>. To claim our full faith, the parts we signed up for and the parts we wish weren't part of the package. AND, we are invited into hope. We are asked to remember that we are a people who believe the power of God's love that includes resurrection. That we are a people who believe another world is possible, and we are called to be part of living into that new possibility. Christians are a people of Good Friday AND Easter. This season I pray that together, we can

look at the fullness of our faith, and find where the Spirit is leading, from within and among us, in the midst of it all.