

**Twenty-second Sunday of Ordinary Time/August 31, 2014**

**Romans 12:9-21; Psalm 11; Matthew 16:21-28;**

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***"A Stumbling Block"***

In our gospel passage for today, we find Jesus and his disciples continuing on from Caesare'a Philippi. Peter, likely still feeling the high from his personal blessing by Jesus. You may recall from last week, Peter answered Jesus' question, "*Who do you say that I am?*" with what has become known as Peter's Great Confession, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!*" With that, Jesus answers, "*Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter (Petros in Greek/Kepha in Palestinian Aramaic which Jesus spoke), and on this rock (petra/kepha) I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it.*" Jesus goes on to say he will give Peter the "*keys of the kingdom*" and the power to permit or forbid any actions within Christ's church.

So we can imagine Peter is feeling pretty good about himself when Jesus begins to talk about the suffering he will endure at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, that he will be killed and then on the third day be raised.

None of this, of course is what Peter has had in mind for the Messiah, the Christ. In Peter's mind, and certainly in the mind of all the disciples and all the people who have been coming out to see and hear and touch Jesus, if he is indeed the Messiah of the Jewish people, then he must be a conquering hero, he must become king and one who will lead his people over their oppressors. This was without a doubt the going thought in that time, of what Messiah was supposed to be and we can't blame Peter for thinking this way.

Besides, Peter now has been given this authority by Jesus himself. The authority to determine what this kingdom will be about, the power to permit or forbid. He sees himself as Jesus' right hand man, his primary advisor. And so he speaks up, ready to use his new found power, but mostly just reacting to what Jesus is saying. Reacting to the idea that his dear friend and teacher might have to suffer and die. "*God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to you!*"

But Jesus turns to him, and with fire in his eyes, and a sudden surge of anger in his voice, says, "*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.*"

Peter, the one Jesus had just called the *rock*, the foundation stone upon which he would build his church, the *building block*, has now, just like that, become the "*stumbling block*", the one who is thinking from a human perspective, not from the divine perspective.

Wow, what a bummer, what a let-down that must have been for Peter! Can you imagine how hurt he must have been, how little and small he must have felt? And he hadn't even said anything wrong, really. He was speaking out of concern, out of love for Jesus. What could have been so wrong about that?

We can try to understand Jesus' strong reaction to Peter. Jesus has been leading this group of 12 disciples all over the place, teaching them about this "*kingdom of heaven*", patiently waiting for them to come to some level of understanding of what this is all about. So when Peter makes his confession, naming Jesus as "*the Christ, the Son of the living God*", Jesus knows they are ready for the next step.

And this passage that we have here today is the turning point. Both in the ministry of Jesus, as well as in the theology that Matthew is teaching to his congregation. Here, Jesus sets his sight on