

For this past year, watching the evening news has not been for the faint of heart. We have had to face some hard realities.

In the US 500,000 have died from covid, more than our casualties from WW2. We all know someone.

We watched as George Floyd suffocated under the knee of government officials and have had to face the fact that this was NOT just one incident with a few bad actors. We know the names of other people of color counted as expendable: Breanna Taylor, Freddie Gray, Travon Martin. It is a sickness in our country's soul.

Just this week, an 8 year old in NJ broke down sobbing on her class zoom call because they had no food and she hadn't eaten in 2 days. Childhood hunger was given a face.

It would seem it is time for our false hope and strident denial to end. We need to let go of the idea that 3 cans of soup for the food pantry will truly impact rampant hunger in America.

We need to let go of the idea of wearing a mask during a pandemic is a form of political oppression. We need to stop thinking that petty grievances make us victims.

So much of what has happened in the last 12 months has demonstrated that balancing the scales of justice will require change and loss. In order to dismantle a system built on power and money we will have to learn a new 'normal'.

If we want to build a beloved community we will need to stand on the front lines in solidarity with the poor, the weak, and the vulnerable and accept that sacrifices will have to be made.

***This is our reality as we listen to the*** 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of Mark, where Jesus began to teach his followers: those from long ago and you and I today. Jesus spoke the plain, hard and escapable truth: that even the Messiah would experience rejection – suffering – and death in order to break through the stranglehold of power and money on God's creation.

Even Jesus would have to sacrifice a quiet retirement with a small garden and grandchildren playing at his feet in order to re-set the universe according to the Divine Plan.

The temptation to turn away from the cross which stood on the horizon was very real. The temptation to reject the path of self-sacrifice, to barter away the lives of some of God's children in order to gain a few more months, a little more luxury, some peace and quiet was very real.

Peter stood right there – Jesus' right hand man. He was devoted to this Jesus and so he tries to silence this one he had just called Messiah – the Anointed One of God. "Find an easier path," Peter suggests. "A way around the suffering and dying, some kind of compromise."

Peter sought a future where everyone agrees to try a little harder, to be nicer to everyone, to pray more often, maybe give a little more. **Peter sought a future where everyone was improved but no one was transformed.**

He wanted a path forward which did not require naming the evils that defy God,

a future which did not involve uncomfortable conversations or a confession of our own unwillingness to give up our seats of power on the left and on the right of Jesus.

We hear as Peter takes his stand: **not alongside the one** he called the Son of God but as **an adversary – a temptor** – as he sought his own way forward.

**And Jesus spares no feelings and minces no words. Get behind me Satan! Your way is not God's way.**

There is no easy way to dismantle the kingdom built on power and money. Pious sentiments are not enough. Temporary disappointments effect no real change.

Today Jesus begins to teach us the hardest lesson of all: The path forward to God's community where the rule is love and life is abundant goes **through, not around**, suffering and death. **His** suffering and death; **our** suffering and death....with resurrection life in the hands of God.

**Today's reading should stop us cold.** Jesus lays out the plain, hard, inescapable truth: the Son of God must undergo great suffering, be rejected by everyone in power and die.

“Do you understand?” Jesus asks. ALL TOO WELL we reply. And if this new life in Jesus demands a cross from us as well, we are not sure we want this kind of saving.

Mark Twain wrote: It's not the parts of the Bible that I don't understand that bother me, it's the part that I DO understand.

**We understand what Jesus is saying all too well.** To follow this Jesus is to admit that like him we are totally dependent on God – and not just any God, but the one who raised a crucified Jesus from the tomb.

**At the moment of our deepest need, when this world is crushing us, it is a suffering Messiah to whom we turn for salvation.** In our living, our suffering and our dying, it is the suffering Jesus who walks with us, accompanies us through the valley of the shadow of death.

When we must release our hold on the power of this world, trusting in the Creator God, trusting in the promises of Jesus, Jesus stands with us. He is God's good news.

The cross is on your horizon, where do you stand?