

“What Gets in The Way?”
Pentecost 13, Matthew 16:21-28
August 30, 2020; 9:00 am
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
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Jesus Speaks about His Suffering and Death

²¹ From then on, Jesus began telling his disciples what would happen to him. He said, “I must go to Jerusalem. There the nation’s leaders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the Law of Moses will make me suffer terribly. I will be killed, but three days later I will rise to life.”

²² Peter took Jesus aside and told him to stop talking like that. He said, “God would never let this happen to you, Lord!”

²³ Jesus turned to Peter and said, “Satan, get away from me! You’re in my way because you think like everyone else and not like God.”

²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples:

If any of you want to be my followers, you must forget about yourself. You must take up your cross

and follow me. ²⁵ If you want to save your life,^[a] you will destroy it. But if you give up your life for me, you will find it. ²⁶ What will you gain, if you own the whole world but destroy yourself? What would you give to get back your soul?

²⁷ The Son of Man will soon come in the glory of his Father and with his angels to reward all people for what they have done. ²⁸ I promise you that some of those standing here will not die before they see the Son of Man coming with his kingdom.

WEARY HURT OR WILD HEART?

Peter, oh Peter. You just “got it” a few verses back! What happened? What happened to

“You are the Lord, you are the Christ, you are the Holy Messiah, that was promised to us from days of old?!”

Now, you’re rebuking Jesus? Telling him, “You don’t know what you’re talking about, Jesus! Hush! Surely you’re not going to lay down your life?! Surely you’re not telling US we need to lay down our lives in order to save them?!” Oy Vey!

Peter just got a new name; The Rock. Told that he was being called to be on the Team—part of the Bedrock—

the foundation of forming Christ's church. But now he's rebuking Jesus! In the very next passage! He got the Jeopardy question right but missed the bonus round!

Peter took his eyes off the ball. Took his looking at Jesus in faith and trust and looked down at the raging sea once again.

²³ Jesus turned to Peter and said, "Satan, get away from me! You're in my way because you think like everyone else and not like God."

"Peter, you're being a stumbling block. We can't have that. Peter—YOU have your own stumbling blocks. Things that get in the way of truly seeing who I am. Who you are, and who you are called to be—God's Beloved child, with a Divine Call on your life!

Disciples—one and all, in every age—especially now—you might have some stumbling blocks too! You are called to be "Channels of Peace." Pathways and prophets of my mercy, compassion, justice and Love." But those channels those pipes if you will, get a little clogged sometimes. Get some calcium built up around the edges.

What are our stumbling blocks? What keeps us from moving forward in our personal journey of the soul, in personal relationships? In community? What become stumbling blocks to faith and movement that get in our way of following Jesus?

Answering the call?

"Make me a Channel of your peace" we pray and sing. But, what blocks our channels? Keeps us and our message and intention from being clear?

MY PERSONAL PIPE BLOCK:

I have a personal "pipe block" if you will.

It's my "Fix- it Mode!"

Passion and energy and drive to always look to the road ahead. Move forward. Press on toward the goal! My fix-it mode and enthusiasm propels me to always look forward and move on, without always stopping to listen to the underlying pain and grief that might need to be heard, acknowledged, given time and space to be.

They say that about men! They jump to solutions—especially when women cry 😊. But I think that compulsion to look for solutions right away and solve problems can definitely be true of women too.

My own eagerness to move forward into "What's next, Papa?!" can leave others feeling left behind, or not heard. I deeply apologize if I have left you feeling that way—ever—and want you to know I am working on that in myself! My excitement about what Spirit is up to in us and among us is keen—and that excitement can drown out the other emotions and voices, and leave them in the dust.

I have only wanted to see this church thrive and do so much more than just survive! Or worse—shrink and die. My exuberance and enthusiasm sometimes leave others behind. What's implicit needs to be made explicit.

WHAT'S NEXT, Papa?

WHAT BLOCKS OUR JOY?

I think we as a culture have some stumbling blocks as well, and it has to do with collective guilt and compassion fatigue. We think we can't feel Joy, or shouldn't, when others are suffering so much.

COVID—I feel sheepish to complain about *anything* during COVID because I don't have a child at home! I'm not a teacher—trying to teach online AND in person in a whole new way, and the rules and plans change by the day!

Racism—how do we help at all? Many of you have talked to me about this. We're waking up. Becoming so much more aware of where we've been—over the centuries—and how much others have suffered due to systems that we are intrinsically a part of.

What do we do? Is there anything we CAN do? Is it all so entrenched, so ingrained, that we just throw up our hands and give up before we've gotten started?

We have to learn to experience joy and hope *while* being deeply concerned about others. It's not either/or, like most things aren't. Our feeling overwhelmed to the

point of indifference does nothing to help change the world and help change the plight of oppressed and suffering peoples.

Getting overwhelmed and doing nothing helps no one. A real stumbling block for us as well-intentioned humans is when our good intentions fall flat, say the wrong thing, or we try to save the whole world instead of changing our little sphere of influence.

“The world has a savior and it's not you!”

Whew! We don't have to peel all the potatoes. Not today or any day. We don't have to keep ALL the plates spinning in the air! It's okay to drop the ball every now and then. Even several times a day!

It's okay to be made aware of our shortcomings. Of times we have hurt people—by our action or inaction. Sometimes even completely unaware, certainly not intentional.

People might get hurt just because the world is the way it is and we are a part of a hurtful system. Resigning ourselves to that is not the answer. But wallowing in guilt and being afraid to do ANYthing for fear of doing the wrong thing is also a stuck place.

Do Something. Even if it's tiny. Even if it's peeling one potato—peeling back the layers of our own racism and blindness to the structures and systems that keep others down and living less than fully-whole and realized lives and potential.

The Spirit moves and we are ready to jump in!

Karen Celeste Hilfman, in her new book about finding hope and resilience even in the midst of unbelievable struggle and strikes against us, says a primary stumbling block for us is the fear of risk—specifically the risk of being our authentic selves and allowing others to be who they are wholly, as well.

“My **central** learning that impacts my life is that: when we connect to our **true essence**, to our authentic self, we connect to a reservoir of power deep within us that is filled with love and creativity; when we **risk** connecting to one another in a deeply authentic way, we *see life differently*—no longer are we bound by small-ego thinking that is rooted in limitations, entitlement, blame, judgment and the compulsion to protect our territory, rather we see creative possibilities, abundance and incredible goodness.

When we get past the stumbling blocks on our way to creating authentic community, when we strive to create a place and a space where everyone truly belongs, we find unending wisdom within our collective souls. Untapped creativity to explore and recognize future possibilities.

It is life-giving, this authentic community, and it is world changing. We can address the brokenness in our world by choosing to live together in ways that reflect our deep longing for the well-being of all.

In spite of how difficult life can seem. How crazy and challenging our individual and communal lives right now appear on the surface.

Hilfman says these do not have to be stumbling blocks, or clogging calcium in our channels of peace, justice and love:

“Though life can be demanding and appear to be fractured or even crushed, somewhere in the midst of the rubble, there is goodness and a longing to be whole that yearns to emerge amongst us.”

SEEING EYE DOG

Dr. Dawn Conti tells a story of a seeing-eye dog trainer reflecting on his experience of training both dogs and their owners. Someone asked him if it was difficult to train the *people* who owned the dogs. He said yes. In fact, the most difficult people to train were those with **limited sight**. They *could see just enough* that they relied on their own sight instead of trusting their dog. He had to train them to respect the value of being a **team**; neither of them would be safe until they learned to trust the other's sight.

Cameron Trimble, a church visionary, encourages us all—individually and in community— to step out in faith, *not* trusting in our own limited vision.

“I can name a number of times I have relied on my own **blurry sight** rather than trusting the collective vision of my **team**. Every time I have tried to rely solely on my *own* sight I have suffered. I have misread people time and again. I have missed seeing opportunities. I have missed benefiting from my team's intuition, experience and wisdom.

“We are made to be in relationships with each other. We are a team by Sacred design. Let us consider the ways we gain greater sight because of the people in our lives who help us see what is before us...and within us.

Taking a risk. Not trying to have all the answers. Looking up, with faith to the One who calls us forward; calls us to be Channels of Peace, justice and love. Remembering we are a Team in this life—on the Journey together.

Make us channels of your peace, Lord. Make us instruments. Get us and our limited sight and perspective out of the way, so that your vision and all-seeing sight might take over and lead the way.

Amen.