

BIBLE READINGS: Romans 12:1-8 Matthew 16:13-20

SERMON

I've always wondered why Jesus would choose someone like Peter as the "rock" on which he would build his church. Peter was the one who later betrayed Jesus by denying him 3 times. When Jesus most needed his friends, when he had been arrested, Peter said, "I don't even know the man."

In fact, only moments after Jesus praised Peter as the "rock" and gave him the keys to the Kingdom of heaven, he had to say to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan."

You'd think that Jesus would choose the most dependable, the most stable, the most intelligent, the most virtuous person he could find to be the leader of his church. But no, he chose Peter - a simple fisherman, probably illiterate, but certainly not educated; one prone to blurting out the first thing that came to his mind; one who tended to fall asleep in the midst of an important event, when he should have been paying attention - like in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the Mount of the Transfiguration; one who was so afraid of what might happen to him that he denied he even knew Jesus. What kind of leader could this Peter be? And true to his character, he later made blunders in leading the church. But Jesus chose him. I wonder why?

Come to think of it, sometimes I wonder why God chose ME to be a leader in his church. I might be tempted to think I worked hard to get here, and that I have many qualities which make me a good leader. But, I have to face the fact that it is not what I have done that has brought me here, but what God has chosen to do in me and through me. There are many things that I forget or neglect to do, and many things that I ought to do sooner or better. Sometimes I become impatient, or say things that hurt people, or say stupid things that drive people away. Yet, God chose ME.... I wonder why?

And why did God choose YOU to be one of his disciples? Is it because you are so perfect? Of course not! We are all imperfect - damaged goods - we are all sinners. Each one of us knows things about ourselves that we are ashamed of, and wouldn't want anyone to know. And it is precisely because we are sinners that we need Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God. He has called us to be members of his family, and to attempt every day to live our lives according to His will, and to repent of our failings - again and again and again. And he has called us into this church community to support one another in that effort.

Most ministers, from time to time, receive a note that goes something like this: "Please remove my name from your Roll. I'm looking for another church." The reason may be that the person volunteered for something and wasn't contacted, or their child was reprimanded by a teacher, or that someone said something that hurt their feelings, or the minister didn't visit when a family member was in the hospital.

Someone once said to me, "I can't believe this would happen in a church." I said, "We are not perfect. These kinds of things, and worse, happen in all churches, for we are all human beings. That shouldn't be a surprise. The point is, can we accept others' limitations and failings in a spirit of love and support, rather than always criticizing and judging, and putting people down?"

I think that many people have a hard time accepting that Jesus built and continues to build the church upon sinful human beings. They keep looking for that perfect church. A PERFECT CHURCH DOESN'T NEED JESUS.

We are, after all, human beings, and we aren't always perfect. We are sometimes unkind and inconsiderate, negligent about making people welcome and encouraging them, and sometimes we become angry when things don't go our way. But we are called to accept one another's imperfections and wrong-doings in a spirit of compassion and forgiveness, and trust that it is God's goodness, and not our own, that our church membership and worship are based on.

One of the things that struck me as I thought about this passage is the miracle of Peter's confession. That the imperfect can catch a glimpse of the perfect, that the sinner can utter words of faith and righteousness, is a miracle of God's Grace.

Why are we all here in this church this morning? Is it because we are so good? No. Isn't it really because God is so good, and we're here to praise him, and to celebrate the miracle of God's grace and the wonder of God's choosing us sinners to do his work in the world?

As Paul says: "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are God's judgments and how inscrutable God's ways! 'For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor?' 'Or who has given a gift to God, to receive a gift in return?' For from God and through God and to God are all things. To God be the Glory forever!. Amen."