

Rev. Kimberly Glenn

In the Name of our one God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

It was nearly three years ago when I first came to visit here. Your rector, Bill Watson, had invited me to come take a look at the opportunity to join the staff here as his assistant. I admit that I was intrigued with the invitation, the job description really fit my skill set. The only question was, would I feel welcome here - not only here at St. John's but in Lynchburg. When Charles and I came to visit on a beautiful sunny Sunday, we drove down Route 29 through gorgeous mountain scenery; scenery that reminded me of my childhood home since I grew up just over the mountain in Lexington. When we came in to worship that day, we were greeted so very warmly! The people we met could not have been nicer. I was deeply moved by the service. Never had I seen so many acolytes! Very rarely had I heard any Episcopal service include prayers written especially for that particularly community! It was a rare treat indeed to worship here with all of you. When Bill graciously offered me the position, I accepted and felt a sense of pure joy. I had a vision of what it would be like to serve here. I would be able to serve with Bill until he retired at 72. By then I would be 65. It would be perfect. I could not have been happier. And then God had other plans.

When Bill told me of his retirement plans I was and still am very happy for him and for Sallie. I'm still here and will be for some time, but my vision of my future has changed. I think we all tend to imagine our futures based on the steps we take in our lives. We put certain wheels in motion when we get married, when we have children, when we start a new job. Even though we know that things change we tend to operate according to the vision we have in our minds until something happens that interrupts

that vision; something surprises us from out of the blue and we find that the vision we have needs to be altered and adapted to the new situation.

In our gospel reading this morning, Peter has the vision of his future with Jesus abruptly interrupted. For Peter, all the signs were pointing to a certainty that Jesus of Nazareth was truly the son of God. In fact, in the scripture that comes before this text Peter confesses that belief to Jesus. By now, the disciples had spent some quality time with Jesus getting to know him. They observed the way he encountered people in the villages they visited. They saw the way the people responded to him. They discovered that there was nothing duplicitous about Jesus. He was the real thing. He had gifts that exceeded human capacity and yet he was made of flesh and blood. This extraordinary man had chosen Peter as his trusted aide. I imagine Peter was honored by that. I imagine that Peter envisioned a high place of honor for him and his disciple friends. They would sit on Jesus's court when Jesus eventually took the throne of power. But that was not to be.

You see, power for Jesus didn't look like the power exhibited by Israel's kings. Jesus' sense of power didn't come about by way of violence the way Rome's power did. Israel's kings enforced their power by way of the laws of Torah. Rome exerted its power by threats of violence against potential enemies. Jesus demonstrated power through love; God's love.

New Testament scholar Alan Culpepper says that "(Peter's) error shows how difficult it is for us to ever fathom the mind of God." He says, "All our understanding is limited by our humanity and corrupted by our sinfulness." Our sinfulness, in this case and in lots of cases, is that we assume that the ways of the world are the only means

that we have in which to bring about God's justice. We assume, don't we, that because violence is used against us we must use violence to bring about peace. Jesus leads us to a different way of thinking about how we should oppose worldly power.

When Jesus told Peter that he "must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed," Peter rebuked Jesus. The Greek word used here for rebuke is the same Greek word used to refer to Jesus silencing the demons. Peter pulled Jesus aside and told him to shut up and rid himself of that thinking. "Get behind me, Satan!" Jesus told him. You see, Jesus wisely perceived that Peter did not understand that this was God's plan; that the powers of the world would not have the last say. Peter presumed that killing Jesus would be the end of his dream; he had not imagined that anything good could come from the death of a dream. Scholar Alan Culpepper says, "(At that moment), Peter was seeking blessing for himself and his own. Jesus, (however), was seeking to usher in an era of blessing and peace for *all* people." In order to accomplish that, God had to show the powers of the world that their weapons of torture could do nothing to counter the enormous power of his creative love. When Jesus died on that cross, his blood that poured out poured out God's love for us *all*. Now it's our job to harness the power of that love and pour it into the world. It is our job to follow the way of Jesus.

Jesus says, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." When Jesus said those words, "take up their cross," I am sure he did not mean to wear a cross on a chain around your neck (like the one I have on today.) The cross as a symbol, as jewelry, can have deep meaning. But it is not the meaning that Jesus was referring to that day. Taking up a cross in his day

was an extremely courageous thing to do, especially for someone who was innocent of any crime. It meant being willing to risk everything in order to oppose the unjust systems of the world. Jesus was and is telling would be followers that following him means investing oneself wholly into the mission of opposing injustice; of playing a role in God's redemptive work in our world. I believe that each one of us has a unique role to play in that work and it is up to us to discern that role. When we form teams for service and mission, we pull on a variety of human gifts and talents that together can work miracles.

Taking the time to discern is a challenge for most of us. It means setting aside time from our busy lives to pray and to study scripture. When we do that, we are ready when opportunities appear for us to counter injustice. Just this past week, such an opportunity appeared for me. When I listened to the students from Stoneman Douglas High School, the students from Florida whose classmates and teachers were senselessly gunned down, I heard God speaking to us through them. They spoke eloquently in the face of pain and trauma about the need for our society to take serious action against gun violence. Is it perhaps time for all of us to pull together, each bearing our crosses, and act on God's behalf?

Peter demonstrates for us how easy it is to turn from God's call toward our own needs and desires. We desire security, safety, respect and prestige. We mightily resist putting any of that in jeopardy. I'm as guilty as anyone of that sin. Maybe we need to reconsider our commitments in light of this gospel. How can we best express our commitment to God and God's dream of a just, merciful and peaceful world?

I ran across a poem by Thomas Shepherd from the 18th century. I think it applies to us today. It goes like this, "Must Jesus bear the cross alone, and all the world go free? No, there's a cross for everyone, and there's a cross for me."

My good friends, we might need to inconvenience ourselves in order to bear our crosses - *really* bear our crosses. We might need to give up some comfort in order to *be with* people on the margins of our society. We might need to risk opposition both socially and politically when we take up our crosses. But God needs **us** in order to accomplish his redemptive work. Or would we rather have Jesus bear that cross alone?