

Carol's Reflection – August 30, 2020

Let's get behind Jesus. Let's make a difference in the world.

But, you know that there is a difference between getting behind Jesus on Palm Sunday and getting behind Jesus on Good Friday.

But we are not at either of those dates right now. We are in the middle of the year, and we are reading Matthew's Gospel and we are right in the middle of the book.

And right in the middle, Jesus is telling Peter to 'get behind him'.

And not just get behind him because everything is good and Peter is going to have the keys to the kingdom, -- after all that was the scripture lesson just last week.

Last week, we had the passage that just precedes today's – we heard Jesus ask the question, who do you say that I am? And after a few false starts at answers, Peter declares "You are the Messiah, the son of the living God."

Jesus answers "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven".

No sooner was Jesus acknowledged as the Messiah than Jesus begins talking about suffering and the end.

Peter is shaking his hands and his head. He is all about getting behind Jesus, but not this suffering business. Peter envisions getting behind Jesus on a day like Palm Sunday.

But Jesus is about something else. Jesus is about taking up one's cross.

Jesus knows that his ministry stands in such contrast to that of the religious and political leaders of the day that his trip to Jerusalem will end in his death. And, in his resurrection.

Jesus is at one with the world, and to be behind him is to take that same path.

As there is suffering in the world, he will suffer. As there is oppression in the world, he will be oppressed. As there is death in the world, he will die. And, as there is life in the world, he will live.

Author Rebecca Solnit says: "empathy, solidarity, allegiance – the nerves that run out into the world – expand the self beyond its physical bounds."

Peter, with his deep faith that Jesus is the Messiah, is in his physical bounds, and is ready to see the world in one way. And Jesus says, get behind me, Satan. Get behind me, stop seeing the world just in that one way! Get behind me. Expand yourself!

From behind Jesus, Peter will gain new sight.

That is true for us too. Only from behind Jesus can we stretch ourselves with empathy, solidarity and allegiance.

Stretching ourselves means letting go of what we hold so tightly that it stops others from having. Stretching ourselves means finding the willingness to learn, and re-learn that our systemic racism, and prejudices have no place in God's Kingdom.

#BlackLivesMatter

In February, Black History Month, golfer Cameron Champ wore one black shoe and one white shoe to raise awareness about BlackLivesMatter.

This week, with the shooting of Jacob Blake in Wisconsin, Cameron Champ put those shoes back on and this time he wrote on them. He wrote the names of people who had been left out of the game – including his grandfather who was not allowed access to some golf courses because he was black.

And the NBA team the Milwaukee Bucks refused to participate in their playoff game. And tennis player Naomi Osaka led a protest which stopped play. And baseball stopped, and women's basketball stopped, and in many more places, people paused to proclaim that this is important. BlackLivesMatter.

We are reminded that by athletes who are willing to be leaders, who cause a whole system to stop, that it is possible to see the world a different way.

American painter Georgia O'Keeffe moved to rural New Mexico after years in New York City. And, she wrote many letters to the people that she loved and had left in another place, and she signed them "from the faraway nearby".

Faraway might have been her physical distance, but in her heart she was nearby. Can that be true for us as well? Can we see others from the faraway nearby?

Artists and athletes and writers and thinkers can help us see the world in a different way. And, if that different way helps us to see outside of ourselves, to connect with others, to connect with grace and hope and love, then, in the middle of it all, in the middle of the year, in the middle of the gospel, in the middle of the pandemic, in the middle of our homes, in the middle of our lives, we can live, behind Jesus.

Let's get behind.

Amen.