

The Fifteenth Sunday of Pentecost

September 13, 2009

Proverbs 1:20-33

Psalm 19

James 3:1-12

Mark 8:27-38

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

“Take up your cross and follow me,” says Jesus.

Jesus might have added “Of course, if you do take up your cross, you will have to put down whatever it is you are carrying now, all the boxes and baggage that are so very precious to you at the moment. You really can’t carry a cross if your hands are full.”

And, of course, a cross is sort of cumbersome, not at all easy to carry, particularly if it’s heavy – and you know it probably is.

And just exactly where are we supposed to go with this cross; just where is Jesus going? Frankly, He makes this cross-carrying sound rather unattractive. I think He’s sounding pretty scary with His talk about saving and losing lives, obscure but scary nonetheless.

So, perhaps, we respond, “Maybe not now; maybe I’ll just see how it goes, thanks. I’ll get back to you.”

There have been ten Bishops in the Diocese of Georgia. The present will be the fourth Bishop in my time as a deacon and priest. I am becoming historical. I had been saying, “I’ll get back to you,” to Jesus

for about twenty years. Finally, at the suggestion of my rector, I made an appointment to talk to Bishop Reeves about “perhaps, maybe” becoming a Deacon. Bishop Reeves was a burly man with a deep, rumbling voice. He had a way of fixing you with his gray eyes; “perhaps” or “maybe” were not acceptable to him. I must add that Bishop Reeves had been a chaplain in the U.S. Navy, and he delighted in “pulling the chain” of an active duty colonel in the U.S. Army; however, on this occasion, he listened with commendable patience and then said, “Are you prepared to leave the life of a lay person forever?”

It was the defining moment. My life was very comfortable; my career was at its peak; and, yet, it was so very, very clear that Jesus was calling me, personally, right then, to say “yes” and to follow Him.

Has the cross been all that heavy? Not really, because Jesus carries most of the weight for those who follow Him.

“Who do people say I am?” asks Jesus. The same people who can’t quite pick up that cross, the same people whose hands are so filled by the past, by what has always been: they are the ones who say “John the Baptist or Elijah or one of the old prophets.” What has been must be now and will always be. They are blind to the future, to what can and will be, even though it is plainly before them.

“Follow Me,” says Jesus. “Where are we going?” we ask. “Into the future,” Jesus replies. Don’t cling to the past. Life comes at you fast; pay attention, or you might miss it.

The life you may lose is the one you are living in the past, living as though today, tomorrow, and forever will be nothing but the same. Pick up your cross, follow me, and lose that life, and you will gain a new life, an eternal life.

In His Holy Name.