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Gospel lesson

Last week, Peter declared Jesus to be the Messiah of God. This week, Jesus explains a bit about what that means and the disciples struggle to accept what He tells them.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/Lumo-jesus-disciples/>;
Courtesy of Lumo Project Films - www.lumoproject.com

Matthew 16:21-28

NRSV

²¹ From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

²² And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you."

²³ But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

²⁴ Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

²⁵ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will

find it.

²⁶ For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?

²⁷ "For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done.

²⁸ Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

The Word of God for the people of God

<Children's/Interactive time>

How many of you are familiar with Dr. Seuss's story Green Eggs and Ham? <Let them respond>

What happens in the story? <Let them respond>

What have you had to try that you did not want to, then found it was actually pretty good?
<Let them respond>

Why did you not want to try it? <Let them respond>

Many times we have preconceived notions – we think we know how things are, when really we are just guessing. Then when someone tells us something that contradicts our notions, what do we do?
<Let them respond>

We can make it really hard for people to help us!
Peter said Jesus was the Messiah; what do you think
Peter thought the Messiah was supposed to do?

<Let them respond>

What did Jesus say the Messiah would do?

<Let them respond>

How did Peter react? <Let them respond>

Why do you think Jesus responded so strongly to
Peter? <Let them respond>

When God calls us to something in life, is it always
easy to accept the call? <Let them respond>

Is it easier to shrug off the call, especially if it
means a big impact on your life? <Let them respond>

I want you to ponder: What do you think God might be
calling you to now? <Let them respond>

While not everything we encounter ends with the happy
surprise of Green Eggs and Ham, **God does** bless us
abundantly when we answer the calls that God places
on our lives. May you always discern what those are
and be moved to respond to them with love and joy.

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<Hymn "The Summons">

TFWS #2130>

Message: Acceptance



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/lessons-in-leadership/week-2-fourteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a/week-2-fourteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-lessons-in-leadership-graphics-resources>

Please pray with me?

Ever working Lord who calls us to more,
as we take time now to further consider today's
scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may better discern Your call on our lives and
respond accordingly with love, joy, and all that we
are. Amen.

We continue our "Lessons in Leadership" series today
with "Acceptance."

"This worship focuses on overcoming our natural
resistance to God's call, drawing parallels
between reluctant biblical leaders and our own
modern hesitations. The service provides a space
to honestly acknowledge our reluctance to lead or
serve, helping ~~the congregation~~ [us] actively move
from resistance to acceptance.

Ultimately, it encourages us to lean on God and
our faith community to boldly fulfill our shared
mission together."

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Anyone who is a parent has been faced with the challenge of trying to convince their child to do something they know their child needs to - and even will be glad to have done - yet that their child resists doing. From getting infants to try new foods, through potty training, to doing homework, it seems like parenting involves a lot of cajoling and prodding kids to get moving on things they need to do to keep growing in a healthy way.

And then there is the flip side of it, being on the receiving end of the prodding. My call to ministry was prolonged, with first flutterings when I was in high school, put aside while I spent time in the pharmaceutical industry, then picked up as a second career over thirty years later. Even now as a Local Licensed Pastor who has completed the Course of Study I am feeling further called to get my Masters of Divinity degree and perhaps be ordained as an elder in the UMC. That is my story. Ponder: What is yours?

Moses had career changes in his life too. Raised as the son of an Egyptian princess, he ran from the law and became a shepherd, married to the daughter of a priest of Midian (a descendant of Abraham by a later wife, Keturah). Through all of that, God equipped Moses with knowledge of Egyptian royal language and customs, Hebrew language and traditions, and knowledge of the God of his forefathers.

Who better was there for God to ask, to take His message to Pharaoh and to the Israelite people? But, Moses did not have God's perspective. Moses had left Egypt because he did not have a place in either

community there, Hebrew or Egyptian. He had valid reason to figure he was as good as dead if he returned. So God was patient and persistent, answering Moses's questions with what he needed and reassuring him to trust in God.

Moses went from stun and fearfulness to acceptance and obedience, and God's people were released from slavery to the Egyptians and brought as a free people to their own land as a result - and psalms of praise and joy were sung about the Lord.

Peter went through some career changes. He had been a fisherman, left that to follow Jesus - even declared Jesus the Messiah and had Jesus say that Peter would be the rock on which He would build His church. Yep, Peter was set to be a high mucky-muck, right-hand man to the top dog Himself, Jesus.

Then Jesus said he was going to be killed in Jerusalem. I do not think Peter could hear the "and on the third day be raised" part because of the crashing of his dreams at hearing Jesus would die. Of course he pulled Jesus aside to try to stop this proposed suicide! They had bigger plans - look at the support of the crowds coming to them!

But Jesus was not focused on the plan Peter and the other disciples had in mind. Humanity was trapped in sin, does not even know how stuck we are, and needs to be set free. The only way to make this happen was through Jesus's death on the cross. So, Jesus confronted Peter and the rest of the disciples about their preconceptions and what true commitment to

Jesus really means.

Initially, I think they were confused but trying to be obedient; the transfiguration came a week later to emphasize they should listen to Jesus, and as they traveled onward Jesus told them twice more before going into Jerusalem that He would be killed there and rise from the dead.

After Jesus's resurrection, Peter and the disciples went from stun and fearfulness to acceptance and proclamation, and all believers were released from slavery to sin to become free children of God, heirs to the kingdom - and hymns of praise and joy are sung about the Lord.

Not only that, as children of the living God, we respond with more than praise - the apostle Paul describes how we are to live, in terms that remind me of Jesus's sermon on the mount with its radical love:

- "Bless those who persecute you,"
- "Do not repay anyone evil for evil," and
- "if your enemies are hungry, feed them;
if they are thirsty, give them something to drink."

God calls us to flood the world with the grace that has been given us, that sin and hate may be eradicated through love. Your specific call may not feel comfortable, because it draws us out of the limitations of our societal fear and anger into challenging new opportunities based in love and freedom. And God does not limit calling based on age.

So this week, please:

- † LISTEN FOR/TO GOD. Stop wallowing in old habits and distractions, whether watching TV, doomscrolling on computer, losing yourself in “busywork,” or whatever you do to pass the time, and focus instead upon God. Moses removed his sandals before the burning bush; what posture for prayer or reading scripture might work for you?
 - What is God putting before you/on your heart as a means of sharing God’s grace in this world?
- † TELL GOD YOUR WORRIES. What is stopping you from saying “YES!”? Give it to God!
 - Let God show you the way through/around.
- † TRUST GOD AND GET STARTED. Our vision is not God’s, so we know things will probably change mid-stream somewhat, but
 - we know God is with us and will help us.
- † REMEMBER WE ARE PEOPLE OF GOD, NOT ALONE.
 - Work with others as equals no matter what their social status.
 - Let those God has blessed our lives with help us.

In these ways, may we grow into acceptance and fulfillment of God’s call on our lives as God’s beloved children. Amen.