

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time | For Sunday, August 26th, 2018

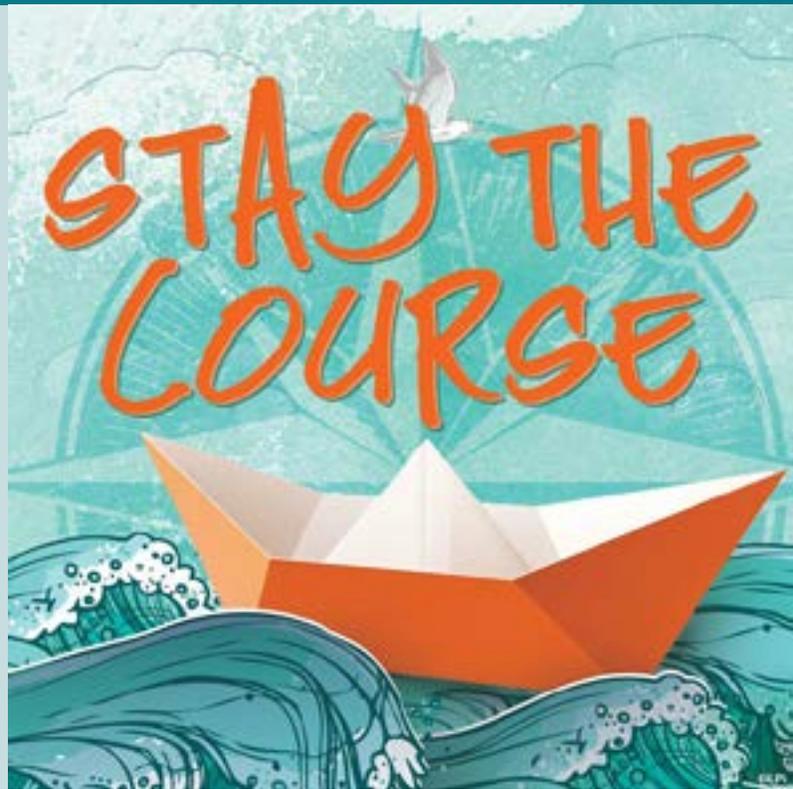
Will I Stay or Go?

Written by Rev. Mark Suslenko

Joshua 24:1-2a, 15-17, 18b

Ephesians 5:21-32 or 5:2a, 25-32

John 6:60-69



Is believing in Jesus Christ just too hard to do sometimes? If you are taking the Gospel seriously, this is not a question that is infrequently asked. Believing in Jesus is tough. As a matter of fact, many of Jesus' original followers "returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him." It is no wonder, then, why such a temptation exists to make Jesus' teachings into something that is palatable and easy to swallow. If we reduce our faith to simply saying certain prayers, participating in particular rituals, and earning merit badges for eternal life, then we clearly are missing the point.

The Gospel requires a change of lifestyle and is meant to make us uncomfortable. Once those original followers realized that following Jesus was much more than a social networking of friends, they began to think twice. Acknowledging Jesus as the "Holy One of God" who has "the words of eternal life" centers a person on a truth that must be accepted or ignored. For many, it is easier to ignore it and return to a safe comfort zone.

Jesus is who Jesus is. As much as we fight it, we cannot make him into who we want him to be. Once we meet him face to face, where else can we go? We are presented a choice of whether to stay and live out this truth or leave and live out a lie. There are no other options.

This is why it is difficult for a Christian to live in our world and preach the Gospel. We cannot accept violence of any kind. We must stand for the protection of life from conception to natural death. We are compelled to work on behalf of the poor and vulnerable. We are asked to welcome the stranger, the alien, the orphan, and the widow. We see suffering in a much wider and deeper context, live lives of mercy and forgiveness, and inclusively welcome everyone regardless of who they are and what they believe. We subordinate ourselves to God and do all in our power to live our lives on His terms, not our own. Protection of the earth, all its creatures, and creation itself is our responsibility as faithful stewards, and we cannot deny that our planet has suffered at our hands. We are called to be humble and walk with justice, to promote peace, be poor in spirit, and maintain a clean heart.

Regardless of our political views on any of these things, the Gospel view remains unshaken and unquestionable. With that tall order before us, it is no wonder many choose to walk away and return to former ways. We often find ourselves engaging in the "Jesus didn't mean that" conversation, convincing ourselves that we are reading too much into his message. What exactly did he mean then? If his teaching was too challenging for some to

embrace and what he said led to his suffering, crucifixion, and death, then it would seem to me it was very radical indeed.

Joshua concluded that “as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” Who do you serve? It is either the Trinitarian God of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the god we self-designed to fit our comfort zone, or none of the above. We may wonder whether believing in the true Jesus really makes a difference. Alone in our faith, it can easily appear that we are paddling into a strong resisting current.

However, together as a community of faith, we can give powerful witness if we are willing to accept the truth and resist the tendency to water it down.

How can we begin to bring the Gospel to the marketplace? Answering this question depends on our situation. We can start by not being afraid to bring the Gospel message to our public conversations about issues currently being faced. We can modify our personal lifestyle choices to be more in line with Gospel values and ideals. We can reprioritize our lives so that we give due time and attention to those things that truly matter. We can change destructive and distorted patterns of thinking and begin to see all people as unique and valued children of God. And, we can develop a strong life of prayer that can keep us centered and focused.

St. Paul was an innovative radical thinker, even though it may seem like he was a chauvinist. Like Jesus, he took the risk. If we think that life in our world is going well, think again. There is conflict and discord in many corners, tensions are escalating, and conflicts are rapidly coming to a head. The world, our country, needs to hear the Gospel. Are you going to stay with Jesus and preach it or return home?

Rev. Mark Suslenko

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PRAYER

*Dear Jesus, help us to spread your fragrance
everywhere we go.*

Flood our souls with your spirit and life.

*Penetrate and possess our whole being so utterly
that our lives may only be a radiance of yours.*

*Shine through us and be so in us
that every soul we come in contact with
may feel your presence in our soul.*

Let them look up and see no longer us, but only Jesus.

*Stay with us and then we shall begin to shine as you shine,
so to shine as to be light to others.*

The light, O Jesus, will be all from you.

None of it will be ours.

It will be you shining on others through us.

*Let us thus praise you in the way you love best
by shining on those around us.*

Let us preach you without preaching,

not by words, but by our example;

by the catching force,

the sympathetic influence of what we do,

the evident fullness of the love our hearts bear to you.

Amen.

—Prayer of Mother Teresa's Fragrance Prayer