

“Deluded or Delivered?”
Isaiah 45:18-22; Ephesians 4:17-25;
Matthew 16:15-25

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We all want something from life. I think that's a pretty self-evident statement. I think we all want something from life. We could think a little bit about what that something is. What is it we want?

As I'm watching Peter and I thought about what he was wanting, last week we talked about how perhaps what he wanted was to be a rabbi, to be one of those who could teach everybody else, so he was having a hard time hearing what Jesus said. But maybe he began to get it. After all, today he says, "You are the Messiah, the Son of God." So now he's got a vision for what Jesus is all about. He knows that his people have been waiting a long time for a messiah. They have been waiting and now he gets to be with the Messiah. Perhaps he has images of marching into Jerusalem with Jesus, throwing those Romans out and setting up the reign of a new David.

Last week we talked about him having a hard time hearing Jesus because of what he wanted. This time it feels like he has a vision that he sees ahead of them and he's not going to let Jesus get in the way. He has a vision and he doesn't want any barriers. So the question last week was why couldn't he hear Jesus. This week he has something in front of him, some barriers to his goal, to his vision. Something is going to get in the way of what he wants to achieve, and it seems to be Jesus. After all, Jesus begins to talk about how when they go to Jerusalem what's going to happen to him is he's going to suffer at the hands of the Pharisees and the scribes and the Romans and he's going to die, (and he's going to be raised again). I don't think Peter heard that "raised again" piece. That's why I tagged it on there. That can't be what the Messiah does. That's not Peter's vision for the Messiah.

So what does he do? He pulls Jesus aside. It's interesting the word that's used there. He rebukes Jesus. It's a little like somebody taking a class for the first time, reading a 10-year-old text book, and then going to the teacher and telling him "The textbook says this. I think you're wrong." That first time you learn something you get really excited about it and want to tell even the people who have been doing it a long time how they're not doing it right. Perhaps in this case Peter has known something for a long time. It's well-ingrained. That's going to be the way it is. Now he's found it. He's got a vision for what he wants. And who's in the way? Jesus is.

Is that anything like anybody else you know? I think I can see myself in it when I have a vision for something, when I think things should be a certain way and somebody gets in the way, says it's not that way, I want to tell them they're not right. Do we ever want to change the people around us? Peter wanted to change Jesus. Do we ever want to change others? Parents, do you ever want to change your children? Children, do you ever want to change your parents? Do you want to change your co-workers or your boss? Husbands, do you want to change your wives? Wives, do you ever want to

change your husbands? Do we ever want to change the people around us? It's interesting how we have a vision for the way things should be; now if we could just change the world to make it fit.

I have a vision right now. I'm really thirsty and I want a glass of water. (*A glass of water sits behind a small barrier so that the congregation can see it, but the pastor can't.*) My vision tells me that the best way of getting things done is with technology, except I'm not finding a glass of water. Now my vision tells me it's got to be on the other side of the chancel, so I've got to get through this choir. (*Pastor looks behind him and walks to the very front of the church through the choir.*) Except when I get here—there's the cross, and maybe that's appropriate—but it's kind of a dead end.

Have you ever had the vision for something and think, "If only I could use the right technology, if only I could get through to that group of people..." Sometimes my vision is a little deluded. Do you ever think about that?

What it is that we think we want? One of the traditional ones is "if I could only be rich, I'll be happy" so we do everything we can to get rich and I don't think happiness necessarily follows. In the process, I become that person who always wants to be rich. I become the one who's always trying the things that my vision tells me to do. So part of the trouble is the way I see things. Perhaps it's because I always think the problem is beyond me, out there somewhere.

What Jesus is telling Peter is, "Peter, you're setting your mind on human things, not divine things." So one of the barriers I might have is the very vision I might have for where I think I'm going to find my glass of water. I assume it's not near at hand, that I have to go through all these different things to find it. Jesus encourages Peter, and perhaps all the disciples, to think on divine things, not human things. That's the beginning of a reshaping of how we think about things.

In Ephesians it says we can be deluded and corrupted by our desires, our lust, what we want, what we think we need. It can lead us astray. So one of the barriers is sometimes what I think I know. Isn't that what it was with Peter? He could rebuke Jesus because he knew what the Messiah was supposed to do. He knew the problem was out there with Jesus. It couldn't have been with him.

How often is it easy to say it's not me, it's all of them, it's this, it's that, and forget the one place we might also look. As Paul says, be transformed by the renewing of your minds. Let your perspective, your way of thinking be renewed. How do we get there? It's like my search for a glass of water. I might need a little help. I may not already know it all. Maybe somebody else could help me out. I see everyone's eyes looking at something over there. (*at the water*) The glass of water wasn't far away, but I couldn't see it because of where it was. There was very little barrier between me and it, but if I didn't ask, I didn't find it. So part of the barrier is inside myself, and how I begin to shape things can make it into something that can be deluded.

Now in a way, I'm saying let go of your dreams, and that sounds like a terrible thing to say. We are always told to follow our dreams, right? I would say most of the time. But we might want to check what they are. I'm not sure every psychologist would say you should follow all of your dreams, because some of them might be deluded. So how do we check it out? How do we get there?

One of the barriers is myself, what I can see, and beginning to let that go. What do I need to let go of and can I ask for help to get there? Isn't that what Jesus is telling Peter? Don't set your mind on human things, but on divine things. That is, go to God for your help. You might even say it's a way of saying "listen to me." And what does Jesus tell him? What's the promise that Jesus brings to him?

Eugene Peterson says it this way:

"Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat; I am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to finding yourself, your true self. What kind of deal is it to get everything you want but lose yourself? What could you ever trade your soul for? What would be worth it?"

My initial reaction to that is *really?* I have to embrace suffering? But he's inviting us to recognize that we will embrace suffering in all kinds of ways that are not helpful for us. I'll go off on a tangent and go through all kinds of machinations to try to get to where I think I want to go, with the suffering that in the end shapes me in ways that aren't helpful and leads me to a place that leaves me empty.

Jesus invites us instead to follow him, to let him lead, to listen to what he tells us, to recognize what he does, to hear his victory. It may feel like losing a dream, but we are given something instead. We are given a new way; a way that helps us integrate into the world that God has given us in a way that fits who we are. It replaces the deluded dreams with a deliverance that brings hope and grace and love, and those things are not far away. We discover they are close at hand when we let Jesus lead us and we follow him. Amen.