

Wesley United Methodist Church

May 5, 2019

„Heroes in a My Way World...“

John 21:1-19

Before the monthly fuel bill became the size of a mortgage payment, it used to be fun just to “go out for a drive.” Especially on Sunday. At some time or another everyone over forty has had the experience of getting stuck behind a “Sunday driver.” A “Sunday driver” is a car full of folks aimlessly puttering along, gazing at the scenery, looking for nothing in particular, enjoying the slow lanes.

No more. With time, money, and energy at a premium, “Sunday drivers” have been replaced by GPS drivers. We want the shortest, most direct, fastest way to get where we want to go. And our onboard computer tells us only what we need to know to get there. No more exploratory meandering. No more unexpected detours. No more unwritten destinations. No more surprising stops. We go precisely where WE want to go. And we’ll never know what we’ve missed.

It’s no longer my father’s world of “My Way or the Highway.” It’s our children’s world of “My way ON the Highway.”

One of the most deceptive songs ever written was first song by Tony Bennet but became the signature song of Frank Sinatra: I’m talking, of course, Of Paul Anka’s “I Did It My Way.” There is so much wrong with My Way that one hardly knows where to begin.

Suffice it to say this morning that the last stanza which proclaims that a true man tries to “say the things he truly feels and not the words of one who kneels” reveals where our culture is putting its priorities. People who do it My Way are people who don’t get on their knees but tell it like they feel it. The notion that you kneel to know what to feel, that you don’t allow your feelings to get the best of you before you kneel in prayer and discern how you should be feeling, escapes this “Do It My Way” world.

In today’s Gospel text Simon Peter knew all too well he was in trouble. On the night Jesus was arrested and hauled off to face the high priest, Simon Peter skulked about outside in the courtyard and—as Jesus had predicted—refused to admit he even knew the arrested Galilean when he was asked. Three times that night Simon Peter denied having a relationship with the man he had followed and called Master for three years.

Simon Peter was no hero. But when the “beloved disciple” looked with the eyes of faith at the man who told them to cast their nets on the right side of the boat, Simon Peter leapt into the water, swimming ashore to reach Jesus before the others. When Jesus asked, Simon Peter did not hesitate to run back to the beached boat and single-handedly drag an enormous net full of fish to his Lord’s breakfast fire. And when, after their meal together, Jesus asked Simon Peter three times, “Do you love me,” the least heroic disciple plainly confessed his love three times.

But that was not all Jesus asked of him. Jesus insisted that “love” was a verb, not a noun. Loving Jesus is not a state of being, it’s a state of doing. Jesus invites Simon Peter to be a shepherd—to feed his lambs, to tend his sheep.

Don’t look at yourself as being on the side line. Be a shepherd Be a housewife. Be a secretary. Be a teacher. Be a construction worker. Be a plumber. Be a systems analyst. Be an architect or archeologist. Be a doctor. Be retired. But first and foremost, be a follower of the Risen Christ who will always do what is human, and always what the humane thing is to do in an inhumane world.

We don’t have to be heroes. We don’t have to barrel down “My Way” roads going “our way ON the highway” because Jesus has shown us a different way. Jesus has shown us that HE is The Way.

“My Way” became Sinatra’s claim to stardom. But “My Way” is the epitome of a GPS lifestyle. While doing everything “my way” the singer proudly proclaims, “I planned each chartered course, each careful step along the byway. And more, much more than this, I did it my way.” The singer proclaims as the highest mountain “the things that he truly feels” and disclaims the sacrifice and sanctity of “the words of one who kneels.”

When Simon Peter confessed his love to the risen Christ, he was charged with a shepherding mission. But Jesus also let him know that there was a price to pay. In Simon Peter’s “old age” that is, in his new life as a witness to a resurrected Jesus, there was the very real possibility that he might join his Savior in the ultimate price of faith and obedience. Jesus words about “stretching out” his hands, being girded with a belt and being led where he did not want to go, foreshadowed Peter’s death.

As Jesus’ disciple, as one who lives and loves the way of his Lord, Simon Peter’s “way” will not be “his way.” Jesus and God will be his way. Simon Peter would not call himself a hero. But Simon Peter would hope to call himself a disciple, a follower, a shepherd who cared for his Lord’s sheep.

Jesus’ disciples are no heroes. Jesus disciples are not grandstanding, high-fiving, look-at-me, chest beaters. Jesus’ disciples follow the One whose footsteps walk up a Via Dolorosa to the cross. Jesus’ disciples follow the One whose life and death and resurrection were directed by a power outside of his own desires.

Jesus doesn’t ask us to be heroes. But he does ask us to follow him, and to do all we can to serve others. So, which way is “Your Way?”