Earlier this week, I was having an on-line conversation with a friend and a ministry colleague who posted on FB that this week was her final week working as an administrative staff at a seminary institution. Previously she had worked in multiple parish settings, as well as serving as the vice-moderator for our denomination – the *Presbyterian Church (USA).* Many of us were caught off-guard by my friend’s surprised announcement. After all, her current job was what she had dreamt of for a very long time. It’s safe when it comes to job security and it was a great fit for her many gifts and passions. However, she sensed that God may be leading her to something else and that now is the time for her to take the next step in her career.

 I’m sure it was not an easy decision for her, as she wrestled with this for quite a long time. I gave my friend credit for taking such bold leap of faith, not knowing what her future holds while placing her total trust upon God and the Spirit’s leading. This is a huge commitment on her part.

 Undoubtedly some of us may have had moments like this when we feel that we are standing at the crossroad or out on the runway anxiously waiting to take off for our next adventure in life, just not sure what God may be leading us up to next - new school, new job, new country, new home, or even new relationships. Just like my friend who needs this time to think through a few things in her life and to weigh out her options and to set her life priorities in order. I admire my friend for taking such courageous stand as she faces the uncertainty (and the promise) of her future. It’s easy for us to maintain status quo and to stay in our secure and comfort position. But if we do that, then we might put God is a box, eliminating some of God’s options and failing to realize what God may have installed for us in accordance to God’s plan.

 **How we respond to God’s challenges through our failures and successes lead us to a deeper discernment and understanding of God’s perspective and relationship in our lives.** After all, isn’t this what the season of Lent all about? It’s about asking the hard questions by examining our relationship with God through our faith and obedience.

 Believe it or not, we are only one week away from Holy Week – the holiest time of the Christian calendar. We could almost sense the finish line after a long journey, but we’re not quite there yet. A lot still needs to happen…by that I don’t mean what we need to prepare physically for Easter. Often times we get so caught up with all the “extra-curricular” activities surrounding Easter (whether it’s religious or non-religious), while neglecting to observe the most sacred moment of remembrance of our Savior’s ultimate giving for humanity.

 **The season of Lent stands as a testament of our life-long journey of faith, as it tests our spiritual discipline and our patience, that we are in this for the long-haul spiritual marathon and not just for the sprint.**

 In the Gospel text that we just read, we saw how Jesus was about to enter Jerusalem for the very last time. He would be welcomed into town by the crowd in a celebrity fashion, only to be disappointed and became angry by what he saw at the temple. He would also receive words that his dear friend Lazarus had died a few days earlier. He needed to make a pastoral care visit. So he dispatched himself to comfort Lazarus’s sisters Mary and Martha as he grieved alongside with them. Jesus sure had a busy final coupe of weeks here on earth…but no one knew exactly what was about to happen except Jesus himself. He kept it pretty much all to himself. **Can you imagine what emotionally and psychologically trauma Jesus had to go through during these final days?** **His soul was “deeply troubled”**, as he indicated to his disciples.

 Up until now, the disciples had only received small clues as to what was about to take place going into Jesus’s final week. Even though Jesus had precluded of what was going to happen, many of his disciples still didn’t get it. The disciples only thought that they would only come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish festival of Passover. But the time is “almost here, but not yet”. A lot still needs to happen…meantime we must wait and see how things develop. How’s that for a cliff-hanger? Stay tuned and you’ll find out…

 Deep inside, Jesus realized that his earthly mission may soon be over but God’s mission would continue and be carried on by others who believe in him and follow his teachings. Jesus fully embraced the will of his Father, as he analogized himself as a ***“grain of wheat that must die, in order to bear much fruits.”[[1]](#footnote-1)*** Although Jesus’s soul might be perplexed and troubled, but he was nevertheless at peace and assured that this was all part of the Father’s plan of salvation for humanity.

 Throughout this whole “process”, Jesus’s obedience was put to the ultimate test. Think about it, how would we react to the same psychological and emotional distress of what Jesus had to go through? Even Jesus expressed deep anguish, lamenting how his soul is troubled, as he cried out to his Father to “save him from this hour”. He expressed the same anguish when he was hung on the cross in his final hours. Nevertheless, Jesus knew all this was part of the Father’s plan and that this was all part of his earthly mission. Only he could do this and no one else. Jesus knew what He must face in the inevitable. The hour has now come for the Father to be glorified.

 Even upon his final days, Jesus made the most of the opportunity in teaching his disciples what they must continue to carry on his mission, even when he would no longer be with them physically. We must not focus upon what our accomplishments would be, but instead fix our eyes upon the greater mission of our calling. Aim for the heavenly prize that God has installed for us. As Jesus declared to his disciples, **“*those who love their life will lose it, and those who hate their life in this world, will keep it for eternal life.”[[2]](#footnote-2)***

 Christ seeks our undivided attention and our total commitment, when we chose to follow Him. Many of these disciples were willing to drop their nets right off their boats and followed Jesus. Many said they were willing to do whatever and go wherever they need to go. However, some were hesitant when Jesus asked them to surrender ALL and follow him, with no bags, no money, no belongings…Come, just as we are.

 What about us? Are we willing to do the same if Jesus asks us for the same undivided commitment and devotion today? Are we willing to let go of what we have accomplished and achieved in this life, like my friend who’s discerning her next call, in exchange to let God reveal us what our next new adventure may be? We will not achieve the latter unless we are willing to surrender the first.

 As Jesus said, ***"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 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?[[3]](#footnote-3)***

 Furthermore, throughout this season of Lent, we are called to examine our own spiritual discipline by **putting aside our ideological and philosophical difference and focus on the unity and the up-building of the body of Christ**. Our personal prides and egos take a back-seat when we are asked to surrender our power, privileges, and influence for the sake of God’s kingdom.

 When Jesus and his disciples were approached by a non-Jewish crowd who wished to come and catch a glimpse of Jesus. Jesus declared that “**the hour**” has come for the Kingdom of God – both Jews and Gentiles alike, whosoever come, seek, and believe in him, upon the “lifting” of himself on the cross, and the exaltation of the Father’s name.

 Our journey to the Cross invites us to let go of ourselves and let God lead us, while putting aside our peripherals that consume us and deprive us of our true and intimate relationship with God. When we lay down our cloaks and palm leaf fronds to welcome Christ, we ought to lay down these hindrances and distractions of our lives along the path that Christ would trod on his final journey.

 Christ calls us to live our lives with our eyes fixed on the ultimate glory for God. As in our passage today, Christ challenged us, as his disciples that *“whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also.”[[4]](#footnote-4)*

Lent is a season of spiritual discipline as we purge our minds, our souls, and our hearts. Nothing on this earth can separate us from experiencing the fullness of our relationship with God. **The less we focus on ourselves and “our” desires, the more we can then focus our hope and turn our hearts on God…and God alone.**

 Incidentally our text today stops short of another important teaching that came in verses 35 and 36. Christ went on to offer Himself as the hope and the guiding light in this world of darkness. Darkness and the shadow of death will not confine or consume us. The light of Christ will liberate us and set us free at the end.

 As Christ reassured us that ***"the light is with us for a little longer. Walk while we have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake us. If we walk in the darkness, we do not know where we are going. 36 While we have the light, [therefore] believe in the light, so that we may become children of light."***

 Children of Light,Christ has offered his ultimate sacrifice upon the cross.  **The cross is not only a symbol of cruel torture, betrayal, and abandonment but also a place where God demonstrates His greatest triumph, His ultimate love, and victory over the darkness of evil and human sins.**

 As the prophet Jeremiah reminded us that the days are surely coming when God will renew a new covenant with God’s people.[[5]](#footnote-5) God will establish a new covenant for us. He would engrave it upon our hearts, as he declared that he will be our God and we shall be His people.

 Friends, as we head into the final two weeks of this Lenten journey towards the finish line, may we stay on course and maintain our spiritual focus and faithful discipline by fixing our eyes on what is to come and not what is before us. As the prophet Samuel declared, ***“Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Surely, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.”[[6]](#footnote-6)***

 God demands our total obedience over any of our sacrifices that we may offer. Let us surrender ourselves and discern where the Holy Spirit may lead us, even when we fail, stumble, and fall.

 May we not only experience Christ’s agony and grief, but also his passion, love, and gratification of bearing OUR cross and taking on OUR shame, as we take up our own crosses and follow him. Thanks be to God. In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *John 12:24* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *John 12:25* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Matthew 16:24 and 26* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *John 12:26* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Jeremiah 31:31* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *I Samuel 15:22* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)