

Twenty-First Sunday of the Year – August 25, 2019

Isaiah 66: 18-21 Hebrews 12: 5-7, 11-13 Luke 13: 2-30

One of the words that I do not like to hear, especially from a contractor, a computer service individual, a sales person, or the like, is the word “should.” It should be here, it should be done, it should work. It is almost a joke now, but there is a certain seriousness about it.

In a sense, I understand Jesus as addressing the same idea. As he and his followers continue on their journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, teaching his followers what it means to take up the cross and follow him, he wants it to be known that no one “should” consider themselves to be followers simply because of a certain background or status. Basically, Jesus restates ideas that we also heard today from Isaiah.

All of creation is a part of God’s purpose and plan. People from all corners of the earth would be welcome to take part in God’s saving and loving plan. But these ideas were shocking to those among the Chosen People. They felt that they had it made. They would automatically be part of God’s actions. Jesus, however, says that this is not so. It is not easy, it is not automatic, to be part of his mission. The entrance into his mission is restricted.

☒ What we also heard from the Letter to the Hebrews describes this in a different way. Pain, real effort, even suffering,

will also be a part of following the Lord. This is not surprising. We need only remember that Jesus is calling us to take up the cross, the instrument of torture and death -but also the sign of the greatest love – in order to follow him.

Jesus uses an interesting image to illustrate his point: a narrow door. Envision yourselves in a crowd, going to a sporting even, a concert, or at a sale at which the first ones in the store get the best bargain. Every muscle might be strained in the effort to make it in the entrance.

This is the understanding that Jesus is looking for in those who follow him. All of our effort, all of our being, in some way, is to act in such a way that the goodness of God can be learned in what others experience from us. Anyone could look at our lives, how we live, how we speak, how we act, and perceive an insight into the reality of God. It not a matter of “should.” It is a matter of “it is.”

To be part of what Jesus presents to us, we cannot presume anything. We must act, both now and continuously. We must live with conviction a disciplined approach from day to day.

This makes clear to ourselves and to others how it is evident that we share in the loving care and presence of our good and gracious God.