

## 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time – Cycle A

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For some unknown reason, many of the scripture stories we hear today, bring to mind many of the sports and high adventure programs I seem to have been drawn to over the summer. It started with the World Cup this spring and continued with a couple of series about sailing around the world by professional crews on the latest high tech boats. Then there was a series that highlighted everything from one woman who wanted to both climb the highest mountain and break the deepest free diving record. As well as the two men who kite skied the Greenland interior – over 2200 km. There was another about the history and status of people who wear wing suits and base jump off the highest cliffs, including a Russian off Mt Everest not too long ago, all doing up to 200 mph only feet from the face of rocks and other things that can ruin your day if you hit them. And there were two documentaries of young women who tried sailing solo around the world. Laura Dekker from the Netherlands did it in 504 days with stops along the way by the time she was 16. Abby Sutherland from the US was trying for the youngest solo non-stop record but was wrecked in the Indian Ocean by a rogue wave and needed to be rescued also at the age of 16. So, you may ask, how do these stories out of many about crazy adventurers, relate to the everyday lives we live and more importantly how does it relate to our spirituality? Well, I wonder how many of these people may have echoed Jeremiah's words; "You duped me, Oh Lord"? How often do we lament that these endeavors, that life itself was to be easy? How often do we think that this is too hard? In contrast, these sports and adventure people are a testament to focus and passion that the human spirit is capable of. Maybe we all need to fight complacency, indifference and unexpected challenges in our lives, just like they. Not just in our physical lives, but more importantly in our spiritual lives.

After all, our birthright is to be adventurers. We are thrust into life and the game is on. It takes all the experience, knowledge, skill, practice and vigor we can muster to reach the end successfully. In today's readings we get the first clue and maybe the most obvious, from my favorite Old Testament prophet, Jeremiah. He is looking and lamenting, as he often does, about the state of the world he finds himself in - the deteriorating morality of the Chosen People, the rejection of the covenant with their God, the hatred that is engendered by his telling these same sinners of their sins, the personal danger he earns for his prophesying. He is genuinely afraid of the Chosen People. He tells us all, the why of his determination, passion and very need in his heart to preach the good news. He is almost driven like some of these adventurers who are so passionate and focused that all danger seems to fall away. Maybe watching all the adventurers is pointing me to ask myself the hard question – am I as passionate about living my faith as Jeremiah? Am I so compelled that it is very obvious to everyone around, that I am dedicated to serving the Father's will? Jeremiah was beyond that point, he was so committed, that his life's mission of prophesying was overwhelming him and he went crying out to all who would listen that the Father wanted all His children to play nice, come visit much more often, and tell everyone about Himself. There was no doubt in his mind that he was commissioned to bring this message to his people. He was so focused on the Lord's commissioning that he was single minded and in today's society would be labeled as a crazy adventurer, unstable and maybe not very politically correct and dismissed as noise. Even more so, there is something else going on here, all of Jeremiah's life is a foreshadowing of Jesus' life on earth. Both Jeremiah and Jesus were not complacent and accept living in their comfort zones. No they needed to live lives that shook and reframed the secular and hedonistic societies they found themselves. And it was obviously not for their own good, because both met the fate of the best prophets with few exceptions – namely violent death.

Ok, so what does this say for us? How do we be examples of right relationship and right life in the face of such overwhelmingly negativity toward the Lord? As I mentioned two weeks ago, St Paul points out

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we influence each other so very much, that everything about us needs to reflect what we need to be about. If we are adventurers, we need the total focus on preparation and practice. But they and us need to stay focused, always learning, always practicing, and always in a state of preparation. So, we need to ask, do our lives reflect what we believe and preach the good news to all around us? St Paul in this week's letter to the Romans, we are given a rather clear and stark reminder, "Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect." If we put as much practice and preparation into living our lives to be Christian examples to the world as St Paul encourages us, and as the adventurers do for world records and personal accomplishments, then I am awed by the possibilities that we could accomplish. I am awed by how much of the kingdom we can bring to this world – right now.

If we grab on to the loose sail rope to bring it under control or push for the last ounce of strength in us, then the words of Jesus in the Gospel will make sense. Today He "resets" the playing field. He tells his disciples that it is not all smooth sailing. One needs to push oneself in the rarified air of Mt Everest or suffer blackouts hundreds of feet below the surface of the ocean or round Cape of Good Hope in a gale or be pummeled rolling down the face of a 60 foot rogue wave and loose your mast and sails. Jesus tells us in his language that one needs to stay focused on what we believe, practice living it and believe the reward of success is sure. Yes the words we hear are personal, sometime stark and sometimes frightening. But when we do not get it, even Jesus calls one of his best friends a "Satan", a stumbling block in the road of His life. Yes we need to pay attention we need to clear our heads of the secular seductions we are constantly marketed with – the "up sell" to buy into more of what we don't need. We need to clear our hearts to have the focus and courage to live right lives no matter what is our fate. I find in this gospel the subtle call to selfless love - if one truly loves someone, then we would do anything including giving up our lives to benefit them. Well, Jesus says if we love Him then, yes, we will face the same fate as He. No matter how soft or loud the message gets to us, as lovers of the Lord, we need to have passion in pursuing Jesus. We need to take the can-do attitude of the adventurer and walk as Christians, proudly and with gentle love even in the face of overwhelming odds.

So the first thing we need to do is clear away is the error of youth that we will live insulated comfortable lives forever. No! We all die, but how much have we loved while we are here. How much love have we put into every day of our lives? How much have we collaborated to bring the kingdom of the Father to our time and place is the real measure? Second, we need to push aside that the gospel lessons are too obscure or are for the person sitting in the seat next to us. No! we are all given the gift of faith and we are all responsible to nourish it with frequent reception of the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. We need to be prepared for the challenges. And No, again! the person next to us that offends us, needs our active forgiveness as much as they need to live the gospel message. But they don't get it from a book or from the preacher on Sunday as much as from us, face to face without anger, but with love. The third thing we need to push aside is the secular belief that the only good life is pain free. That only happened at Woodstock in 1969 for four days! In the real world, our real world, we need to accept the cards we are dealt and move on, focused on getting to the end with integrity, faith, love, and joy. Not receiving them, but practicing them – giving them away!

So, every story of our human family of human adventure has something to say about the value and shortness of life. As Christians, I feel many times we are dismissed by the societies of Europe and North America, or threatened as in China, and even killed as in northern Africa, Syria and Iraq and that leads to fear and we hide from the challenge. In contrast, one does not get the thrills of a lifetime by not jumping off the cliff in your wing suit and fly like a bird. One does not know what one can do if one does not fight the fears of the unknown and not leave port. One does not follow Jesus if we close our minds and hearts and not discern how we are to live loving and joyous lives. Yes we all have much to learn from those obviously crazy adventurers about how to live life with focus, wonder and excitement. But more importantly the world has something to learn from those crazy Christians about living loving lives – if we show them.