

Sermon for 7

Pentecost July 11, 2021

What's this going to cost me?

2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19

Psalm 24

Ephesians 1:3-14 Mark 6:14-29

When our daughter went off to college she would periodically call home to check in with us...sometimes with good news and sometimes with bad news and sometimes just because she needed to talk something over or she just plain needed something. If my husband was the one who answered the phone, I could usually tell right away who it was because his face lit up as soon as he heard her voice. If she just wanted to talk, she would start babbling like a little brook to her Dad. If she needed something...usually money...she would start with, "Daddy?" And my husband's reply would always be, "Melissa, how much is this going to cost me?" Like most parents, we wanted to be sure she had everything she needed...and, if possible...some of the things she wanted...and we knew that it was always going to cost us something. Taking care of children...even as they're leaving the nest, tends to cost something.

Just to keep it real, there are always other aspects of life that are going to cost us something...and it may very well be that the cost doesn't involve money at all. Sometimes taking care of our relationships involves giving up something that we want...maybe it's a living arrangement or perhaps it's more time alone...maybe it's giving up the dreamed for peace in our household because different members of the family hold different beliefs and attitudes and the family can't come to an agreement about how it's going to be together. Very often the price we pay in our relationships with others is that we have to give up something that we want very much. That's usually the price we pay.

In our scripture passages this morning we hear about the cost of doing something and the cost of not doing something. We heard about David's triumphant orchestration of delivering the precious ark of the covenant...the housing place of God...to the City of David. Along the way as he led 30,000 rejoicing people toward the City of David behind the ark, he stopped to sacrifice 2 an ox and a fatling and then David danced before the Lord with all his might. As the ark of the Lord came into the City of David, Michal, daughter of Saul, looked out of the window and

saw David leaping with joy and dancing practically naked and she despised him with all of her heart. The price David paid for displaying his joy in such a fashion was to provoke the wrath of Saul's daughter. In order to avoid that, he would have had to restrain himself from expressing as he did his full and consummate joy. The price he would have paid to avoid Michal's scorn would have been to subdue himself and his expression of joy. And the people would have paid a price as well when they found themselves barred from expressing themselves in joy. We pay some kind of price for every decision we make. But the price we pay is something that we get to choose. Sometimes we pay a price for not doing something. Other times we pay a price for deciding to take a particular action.

In Psalm 24 that we recited together this morning, we heard the psalmist tell us that everything in the world and all the people in the world belong to God who created all of it. The psalmist tells us that those who have clean hands and a pure heart can ascend the hill of the Lord. That's the price we creatures pay to approach God, our Creator...having clean hands and a pure heart. Our search for God and our worship of God is the price we pay for God's blessing. We worship God; we praise God; we thank God.

And St. Paul tells the good people of the church in Ephesus that God destined us for adoption through Jesus Christ before the foundation of the world ever took place. We have been redeemed through Jesus' blood. Through Jesus we have obtained an inheritance and when we heard the truth of the gospel and believed in Jesus we were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit. The price that Jesus paid to make all that possible for all of us is beyond our imaginations. He hung on a cross for our redemption. He descended into hell to defeat death and then he was resurrected from the dead. He paid an enormous price to reconcile us back to God. What would have happened to all of us...to all of creation...if Jesus had...at the last minute...decided that he wasn't willing to pay the price? It was too high! The gift of eternal life for all who believe in him cost Jesus everything in this world...more than any of us know and more than we can ever repay. And it required a level of trust in God that we mortals can only imagine.

When we heard the gospel story this morning about King Herod and the beheading of John the Baptist, we were invited to examine the dilemma of giving one's word *carte blanche* without knowing what would be asked. We learn from

King Herod that that's not very smart!! In the world in which King Herod lived...and to a certain extent, the world in which we live...a person's word is their bond. The rules of a shame and honor hierarchy in a cultural setting dictate that giving one's word and then following through with keeping that word determines a person's position in that hierarchy and their credibility. Are they someone whose word can be trusted? If a person can't be trusted to keep their word, a fall from grace is inevitable. But what price did King Herod pay for keeping his word by giving his daughter what she asked for...the head of John the Baptist? Now the King is responsible for taking John the Baptist's life. He had an opportunity to show mercy and extend grace to John the Baptist, but he didn't because he wanted to save his own reputation; not John's life. What price is it when you're willing to take a man's life in order to maintain your own credibility? Please don't think that such choices do not happen in 21st century America. Just ask anyone who has spent any time working in our court system. This sort of thing happens on a regular basis. And the one who pays the dearest price of all is usually the one who is the least at fault.

The problems we struggle with in twenty-first century America aren't all that different from the problems people struggled with in Jesus' day. What does it cost us to keep our word? What does it cost us not to keep our word? Which price are we willing to pay? Taking an action will cost us something. And not taking an action will also cost us something as well. Failing to do the work God has given us to do will exact as high a price as doing something God has forbidden us to do...perhaps a higher price.

What has God placed before you and called you to do? What has God placed before St. Paul's and asked us to do as a congregation? What price do we pay for answering the call? What price do we pay for not answering the call? Answering the call will depend on whether or not we are willing to go through the painstaking process of discerning the call...that is, figuring out together what God is calling us to do in this time and in this place. That means we will need to talk to each other on a regular basis about this one fundamental and crucial question: As we emerge from the pandemic, what comes next for St. Paul's?

The pandemic has disrupted the usual rhythms of our time together and that may turn out to be a blessing in disguise. We don't yet know what God is asking of us,

but St. Paul's Episcopal Church is the body of Christ in Bailey's Crossroads and we don't need to look too far to see the needs all around us. What price will we need to pay to answer the call? What price will we have to pay if we don't answer the call? How much is this going to cost us? And it has nothing to do with American dollars; it has to do with time and talent and relationship building, study and conversation and taking our capacity for caring outside these sanctuary walls and into the world just a few feet beyond us. In order to usher us into the presence of God and offer us eternal life, Jesus paid the full and ultimate price. It cost him everything. For which God rewarded him with far more than we can possibly imagine. Jesus paved the way for us. Jesus showed us what we need to do to align ourselves with him and to be prepared to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

How much is this going to cost us? We don't know, but perhaps the better question might be: How much will not answering God's call cost us?

God has the answer for us. We just need to focus on discerning what that answer is. If we ask...and we truly want an answer...God will show us the way.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.