

*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you
O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.*

As those of you who are friends with me on Facebook already know, I played hooky on Thursday afternoon. Steve and I made a last-minute decision to go to baseball game between the Nats and the Cubs. I was out of town when the Cubs were here for the games the first week of September. The two games were called complete and the third was postponed. I just couldn't resist going to the make-up game. There were very few people in the ballpark and we got great seats on the third base side. I settled in and posted on social media: "I'm playing hooky. I hope I find a sermon here somewhere."

Nats fans and Cubs fans were mingled together in our little section of the park. Two guys next to us were good friends and sported tee-shirts of opposite teams. They spent the game dissing each other. When Bryce Harper came up to bat, the Cubs fan yelled "Overrated" and the Nats fan would counter "Better than Bryant". Then they'd laugh and have another beverage. Thankfully, it didn't deteriorate into physical violence.

Apparently, what one calls another depends on your perspective.

And.... There was the sermon! If course I would find it at the ballpark. Baseball is mystical that way.

Not only does identification require perspective, it also requires us to examine how we engage those tricky little fire starters that James calls our tongues! The vocalization of our perspectives can get us into a lot of trouble!

Look at poor Peter, for instance. First, Jesus engages the disciples in a focus group. Self-awareness in that era had much more to do with what others thought of you than what you believed yourself. Jesus gets replies that identify him as a prophet in the line of Elijah or John the Baptist. Those prophets made it clear that wrongdoing was going on and it needed to stop. What the disciples forget is that while Elijah and John railed against wrongdoing by outsiders, it was most often the wrongdoings being done by the Jewish people and Jewish authorities that was the subject of their prophecy.

Jesus is, in fact, coming from the same prophetic perspective. He's not pleased with the Temple authorities and the Pharisees. He isn't pleased with the Roman occupation. That's why he knows things aren't going to end well. Stirring up the crowd against authorities sacred and secular doesn't bode well for a long life and a peaceful death.

From Peter's perspective, Jesus is the Messiah that is going to fix everything.

From Jesus' perspective, being called Messiah is a signal that the worst is about to happen. Peter thinks Jesus is better than the Romans. Jesus knows he's being overrated by his Number One. When Jesus announces what his messiah-ship really means for him and those who follow him, Peter feels the need to say something.

By resisting Jesus' message of impending suffering and death, Peter thinks that he's doing a good thing for his best buddy. Who would want their beloved leader and friend to suffer and die? How would the 'resistance' against the Romans be carried on if Jesus weren't in the picture. From Peter's perspective, the Messiah was to lead them away from the misery they were living.

By rebuking Peter, Jesus provides a different perspective from which to understand the concept of Messiah. It's not about earthly revolution; it's about divine transformation. Jesus as Messiah is about experiencing the breadth and depth of human suffering. It is about trusting God to the ultimate degree. And, for the apostles, the Jesus movement became one that resisted lives defined by human perspectives. Many of them found it worth dying for.

What about Jesus' message that we should deny ourselves, that we should go 'all in'? I don't believe he just meant to 'be good people' or 'put up with what life throws at you'. I believe he is telling us to trust God with our lives. To make our relationship with God, in Christ, the priority of our lives.

Jesus wants us to see ourselves from God's perspective: a beloved child of a loving creator. Not perfect. Not superstars. BELOVED. Someone worth more than the world's definition of success. Someone God was willing to take part in the ultimate human experience in order to give you life eternal.

Can we take that into our hearts?

That we are not here for earthly reasons, but for heavenly ones?

If we do that, what transformation might come in what comes out of our mouths regarding one another? Could we see one another the way God sees us? Could we speak about each other in love? Could we begin to have real conversations with one another over issues that we are passionate about? Might we stop bullying each other on-line or in hallways or in locker rooms?

The two guys throwing shade at the ballpark knew all was in fun. They explained that to those of us around them that they had a great friendship. But, you know, the grandma in the row in front of us weren't exactly happy they were doing it in front of her grandkids. It's easy to forget that we are always setting an example for someone – bad or good. It's easy to lose perspective.

We should take up this gospel and live into it through our lives this week. See each other with God's eyes. Give each other a little slack. Be attentive to who may be adversely affected by our words and actions. Who is being helped?

Do me a favor and let me know what happens. I'm curious to know. Amen.