



**St. Andrew's By-the-Sea**  
*The Episcopal Church*  
*in Destin, Florida*

“Who and whose are we anyway?”  
September 3, 2023

A Homily by the Rev'd Jo P. Popham

One of the oldest continuously producing community theatres in the country is in New Orleans (founded in 1916). Jim and I and the children were blessed to be part of a number of stage productions there at Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré. And one of my best memories at Le Petit was being part of the musical *A Chorus Line*. We had the privilege of being part of the orchestra. There are not many “triple threats” in theater – that is people who can act, sing, and dance. *A Chorus Line* requires a lot of the cast members who were singing while acting and dancing the entire show. So they brought in Jim and me to sit off stage with the orchestra and sing. We sang loudly when the chorus was singing and got to enjoy listening to the solos when we were not needed. Often I would go home humming the clarinet part.

One of my favorite songs from *A Chorus Line* is incorporated in “I Hope I Get it”

Who am I anyway?  
Am I my resume?  
That is a picture of a person I don't know.  
What does he want from me?  
What should I try to be?  
So many faces all around, and here we go.  
I need this job.  
Oh God, I need this show.

“Who am I anyway?” was a piece that introduced the character Paul to the audience.

Jesus had asked the disciples: “Who am I anyway? Who do you say that I am?” and Simon Peter answered: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

Jesus had been instructing the 12 about their mission to share the good news carrying out his ministry on his behalf. Then he shifted the teaching telling them again that he must go to Jerusalem to fulfill God's will and purpose for him. He told them that he would undergo great suffering and be killed at the hands of the Jewish elders and chief

priests and scribes who made up the Sanhedrin. Then he would be raised on the third day. This was inconceivable to most Jews, although Jerusalem was known as the city where prophets are put to death by religious authorities. Jesus accused the religious leaders of revealing that they indeed were “descendants of those who murdered the prophets.”<sup>1</sup>

Peter could not deal with the suffering and death of Jesus. In my sanctified imagination, I see Peter putting his arm protectively around Jesus and saying “No, God forbid it! Never could this happen!” The idea of a suffering Messiah was anathema. Peter had been brought up with the understanding that the Messiah would come as a conquering savior to save the Jews from the occupying Romans. Peter felt in his heart that the cross was not in Jesus’s future, that Jesus would not taste death but would be raised in glory without experiencing the agony of a painful death. And death upon the cross was inconceivable to him. “Surely this must not and cannot happen to you, Lord!” And that is when the rebuke happened; Jesus pulled away from Peter and told him: “Get behind me, Satan!” Who do you think I am, anyway? I have repeatedly told you. But how did he say it? Surely not “with a snarl of anger in his voice and a blaze of indignant passion in his eyes. He said it like a man wounded to the heart.”<sup>2</sup> Jesus expressed his pain as anger towards Peter at that moment. Peter was offering a way out, just as Satan had tempted Jesus in the wilderness. Jesus heard Peter speak the temptation to turn away from the cross. No one would want to die in agony on a Roman cross. Peter had spoken in a sort of protective love. And Jesus’s heart was wounded. And so he spoke to Peter as he did.

Early interpretations of “Get behind me, Satan!” suggest that Jesus was saying “Peter, your place is behind me, not in front of me. It is your place to follow me in the way I choose, not to try to lead me in the way you would like me to go.”<sup>3</sup> Be my follower, Peter, and all will be well.

Jesus was divine. Peter was human. And we are oh, so human, too. And we need to remember that. We are all subject to wanting the safe easy way rather than the faithful

way which may not be comfortable or stress-free. That is our nature. That is who we are. Our identity as Christians does not preclude us from having to make hard decisions nor from suffering. Remember that Matthew was writing to Christian Jews in the later part of the first century during some of the most bitter persecution of believers. As William Barclay interprets Jesus words: “The time may well come when you can save your life by abandoning your faith; but if you do, so far from saving life, in the real sense of the term you are losing life. The man who is faithful may die but he dies to live; the man who abandons his faith for safety may live, but he lives to die.”<sup>4</sup> I wonder if by constantly searching for safety and security and ease and comfort changes compromises who we are as we were created to be as the image of God? I wonder that when we make every decision by what is wise and prudent, if we are losing all that makes life worthwhile? I wonder if instead of safety we might risk it all for Christ and in doing so find life, and life abundant? And life here is not just our physical being, but our spiritual one as well.

Who are we anyway? Am I my resume? This is my theatre resume from the old days. Here is Jim’s. Our work on stage ended after 1994 when we moved to Cherry Island to lead spiritual retreats. And there our spiritual lives changed. And we were not able to run away from God any longer. There we were acutely aware of whose we are. Our decisions form our character and that defines who we are, my friends. Who are we anyway? What if we were to focus not so much on “who am I anyway?” but on whose am I? We are Christ’s, if we are God’s own children. And all our questions are answered.

Lord, may it be so. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Only one such murder is mentioned in the Old Testament (See 2 Chronicle 24:20-22.), but Jewish legend had added others to the list of national martyrs.

<sup>2</sup> William Barclay on Matthew 16,  
<https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/dsb/matthew-16.html>

<sup>3</sup> Barkley is quoting Origen here.

<sup>4</sup> See footnote 2 above.