

Many years ago (and I do mean *many* years ago) I was fortunate enough to be accepted into my three top colleges. So in the spring of my senior year at Charleston Catholic High School I made plans to attend my first choice, a private college in an urban setting. My parents fully supported this decision. Or so I thought. They must've filled out some paper work and sent in some (pretty large) checks. I assumed I knew where I was going. I still remember how great it felt when the mother of one of my friends said, "You know, I think you have the most interesting plans of any of these kids."

It couldn't have been too long after that that something even more memorable took place. My mother called me aside one day that summer – *after* I'd already graduated from high school – to confess just how worried she was about me going to that private college in that urban setting. As much as she'd tried, she couldn't envision her WV-born and bred daughter alone in that big, bad city. She implored me -- no, she TOLD me -- to reconsider one of the other colleges in a more bucolic, "safer", setting.

Maybe you know enough about mothers and teenage daughters to realize how much I'm *understating* just how combustible this exchange was.

"Get behind me, Satan!"

I don't believe my heated exchange with my mother quite included that phrase. But it was a clash between two very different sets of assumptions and visions of the future. A clash between two people who thought they shared a common goal only to find they had conflicting ideas how to get there.

I'm going to assume that Peter, in today's gospel, acted in good faith when he "rebuked" Jesus for all that crazy talk about undergoing suffering, rejection, being killed and rising again. After all, Mark's gospel says that Jesus had only begun teaching them these things.

Peter and the others had grown up with a different expectation of the Messiah – glory and political success.

Living as they did under oppressive Roman occupation, you can perhaps appreciate why Peter bought into this picture of success.

On the other hand, had Peter been *paying attention* to Jesus, whom he'd followed about halfway through Mark's gospel by now?

Jesus healing the sick – including Peter's own mother-in-law.

Welcoming the outcast – be they lepers or lame.

Reclaiming the Sabbath. Taming demons. Feeding the hungry and calming the storm.

Jesus, who sent Peter and all his disciples out to preach repentance.

Jesus, friend of John the Baptist,

imprisoned and beheaded by King Herod,

and who was himself rejected in his hometown of Nazareth.

Of course Jesus wasn't going to settle for conventional notions of the Messiah or anything else.

He wasn't going to take the easy or expected way out.

Jesus was going to live the life – the full, human life -- God sent him to live with such passion and faithfulness,

that he couldn't help but threaten the powers, principalities and oppressors of this world.

Today's passage is the first of three such teachings, such warnings, in this gospel. Jesus could see what was coming.

So when he rebuked Peter,

it was that he loved him and needed to prepare him for a future that was hard to understand.

Here we are on this Second Sunday in Lent preparing to follow Jesus into the unknown And now is when I tell you something else about this day:

It was on the Second Sunday in Lent of last year – March 8, 2020 –

that we last gathered in beautiful St. Paul's

on what we thought was just another Sunday.

We may have walked out of church that day talking about the

mysterious new coronavirus, but without a clue of what it had in store for us.

Maybe it's just as well we didn't know.

We may not have been able to believe it even if someone had somehow told us.

“Get behind me, Satan” – am I right?

We may think we know where we’re going as we dig our way out of this pandemic. As more vaccines become available, more of us are vaccinated, and cases drop, it almost feels as if we can grasp a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel. Pray it may be so.

But that’s different from knowing exactly where we’re going. Things won’t be exactly as they were back on that second Sunday in Lent last year. We won’t be the same people we were back then. Yes, we’re all a year older (and it may feel like even more!). But are we any wiser? That’s an open question.

Let’s mark this odd anniversary by taking to heart this teaching from Jesus – to Peter, to each of us. Let’s dare not presume to know where all this is headed and who we’ll be when we get there.

I ended up going to a state university in a little town in Ohio. It probably wouldn’t have prompted anyone to say that it was the “most interesting” scenario of my graduating class. But I managed. And by the time it was over I was sorry to leave. Along the way I met my best friend, the man who would become my husband, and the first female ordained minister I’d ever known.

It wasn’t what I expected. It wasn’t what I thought I wanted. It was *really hard* to accept and go there. But it was the path for me. It was the path that made me “me”.

Sometimes we don’t know what’s best for us. Rarely do we know what the future holds. Always we can trust and follow Jesus.

Not that he promises it will always be easy (it won’t be). But Jesus does promise to go with and before us, challenging and changing us to be the people, the disciples, he knows we can be.

Thanks be to God.