



September 3, 2017  
22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, A  
Storms, Trees and Violins

1. Life is difficult
  - I remember reading that in Scott Peck's book, "The Road Less Traveled" many years ago
  - he said that if you can accept this fact, you can actually transcend it
  - yet so many people are bogged down by difficulty, pain, suffering
  - it's hard to transcend something that threaten your well-being, rob you of joy, and make it hard to see the good in life
  - just ask Job today who cries out, "You have duped me, O Lord, and I let myself be duped. You asked me to speak your word and it has brought me derision and reproach
  
2. In today's Gospel, Jesus rebukes Peter for not admitting the reality of the cross
  - Peter can't fathom how suffering could ever be a part of the picture
  - he can't believe that the Son of God would have to suffer, or carry the cross, or be put to death
  - and, like Scott Peck reminds us – you can't transcend difficulty if you don't admit it
  - Jesus reminds us that the cross is part of life, not a punishment
  - and, in fact, it has the power to strengthen them and open them more to life
  
3. A story is told about a famous violin maker who was known to carefully select the wood for his violins from the north side of the tree trunk
  - when people questioned him about this, he pointed out that it was the north side of the tree that faced the brunt of storms that came that way
  - it was that side of the tree that was buffeted by the wind and the rain
  - as a result the wood on that side was stronger and more resilient
  - he found that if he shaped his violins from the wood on the north side of the tree, both the tone and the timbre of those instruments would be richer
  - therefore, when the winds came and the rains struck, one could hear the trees of the forest groan under the violence of the storm
  - but the violin maker would only smile and say, "I love that sound, for it's the sound of the trees learning to be violins
  
3. When Jesus says we must take up our cross and follow him, he is pointing to a similar truth
  - as difficult as it can be to bear the burdens of life, each challenge has the potential to deepen us, teach us, and allow us to grow

- often these struggles help us progress, and be attentive to things we may not otherwise pay attention to
  - pain seizes our attention and helps us to value what we otherwise might miss
4. We have to be careful here to distinguish between the good that comes from pain and saying that pain is good
    - sickness, suffering and death are not good things
    - but when they cannot be avoided, we are called to take them up as crosses to follow after Christ
    - when we do so they have the potential to deepen us
  5. I have witnessed this time and time again with couples on Retrouvaille
    - they go through misery in their marriage – it's painful and tense and very hard, but they often pull through with a greater and deeper love than when they started together
    - I have seen this in our LEAF ministry for families of incarcerated persons
      - the angst and sorrow these parents and loved ones feel is raw and deep
      - but the support, love, encouragement and affirmation they receive releases hope in them and lifts them from fear
    - I've spoken to parents who had lost their teenage son
      - they're using their experience to speak to other parents and teens about the challenges of mental illness and how to best navigate when someone you love is ill
    - I've met with families after a loved one dies, who recognize and value all the beauty of their relationship in a brand new way than when the person was alive
  6. Life is difficult – there's no doubt about it
    - everyone has a cross to bear
    - but the good news is that our cross is not a punishment but an opportunity
    - so when evil strikes, when pain begins – do not be afraid or despair
    - if we can take up our cross and carry it in Jesus' name – it need not paralyze or destroy us
    - if wind storms can change trees into violins
    - then certainly the crosses we carry in Jesus' name, can transform us into genuine sons and daughters of God!