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August 31 2008

Exodus 3:1-15

Romans 12:9-21

Matthew 16:21-28

Where did the summer go? How did it get to be September so quickly? Wasn't it just last week that we were celebrating Memorial Day? Doesn't it seem like the school year just ended? Doesn't it seem that it was just yesterday that we put the boat in, or opened the cottage, got out the fishing poles and golf clubs, or took off our shoes for the first time to walk along the beach?

Can you believe it is already September? Can you believe that schools are already starting. Where did the summer go?

Labor Day weekend is a weekend on the cusp between summer and fall. Labor Day weekend is on the cusp between a season of schedules filled with times of rest and relaxation and a season when the schedules are filled again with times for study and labor.

This Labor Day weekend is different for Linda and me, as we are standing on a different cusp, in the midst of a different transition. This year, for the first time in 18 years, we have no children at home preparing for the first day of school. Tuesday morning we will not follow our usual ritual of taking a picture of the boys headed out the door for the first day of school. This year our boys began the first day of school at College. The boys are on the cusp, beginning school many many miles away. And we are on the cusp, beginning life together in a nest, a home that is empty.

How many of you are in the midst of some sort of transition? How many of you find yourself living on a cusp? Perhaps on a cusp related to your health or the health of someone you love. Perhaps on the cusp of a new life—a birth in the family, or perhaps of a death in the family. Perhaps you are on the cusp of a friendship or marriage beginning, or ending. Perhaps you are on the cusp of new employment, or no employment, a new career, or a new hobby, or maybe even retirement. What transition are you in the midst of, what cusp do you find yourself standing on?

In our readings this weekend, we find people who are on a cusp in their relationship with God. Peter has just declared Jesus to be the anointed one of God. In response, Jesus has declared Peter blessed. And now, on the cusp, a transition takes place. Jesus begins to change direction, to turn toward Jerusalem. Jesus begins to teach his disciples that as God's anointed one, he will undergo great suffering and die. Peter refuses to make this transition with Jesus. Peter refuses to give up his understanding of what God's anointed must do. Peter refuses to accept that God's anointed would suffer and die. So, Peter takes Jesus aside and rebukes him. God forbid it Lord. This must never happen to you.

In Exodus, Moses is hiding from Pharaoh after having killed an Egyptian. While tending sheep, Moses encounters God in a flaming bush. From the burning bush, God declares to Moses that God has heard the cry of the people and is about to act. God has chosen Moses, to go to Pharaoh and demand that he let God's people go. Moses does not understand, and questions God. "Who am I" that I should be the one you choose? Eventually, after many questions, Moses agrees to go to Pharaoh to demand the release of God's people.

Moses and Peter both experience startling encounters with God. Both are called to understand God in a new way, and to follow God in a new direction. Both, are on the cusp of something new.

How differently they react!!! Peter arrogantly takes Jesus aside to rebuke him. He does not seek to understand Jesus. No, Peter tells Jesus that he cannot be right, this cannot be so.

Moses knows that he is standing on holy ground. Moses takes off his shoes so his feet touch the holy ground, earth "humus". To touch the earth, is to be humble. Barefoot Moses humbly questions, as he tries to understand who this God is, and what this God is asking of him.

Our readings this weekend remind us that those times we find ourselves "on the cusp" are holy times. Times of transition, times "in between" are times when God is especially present in our life.

In transition times, we can follow the example of Peter. We can take God aside and rebuke him. "No, God I will not accept that which I do not understand. No God, I will not accept this new way, this new vision of who you are, this new direction that you are calling me to follow. No God, my way of thinking is better than yours."

Or we can imitate Moses. We can begin with a spirit of humility. We can acknowledge that life on the cusp is holy, life in transition is holy. We can acknowledge that when we are living on the cusp, when we are living in transition, when we are living on holy ground, and in holy times, there are more questions than answers. We raise our questions in a humility that acknowledges that the ways of God are far beyond our ability to comprehend. We raise our questions, remembering that it was in a spirit of humility that Moses came to a new awareness of truth.

Paul gives us some examples of how to live humbly: outdo one another in showing honor, bless those who persecute you, do not be haughty, give your enemy food and drink, associate with the lowly, contribute to those in need,

On the cusp of this Labor day weekend, we look back and wonder, where did the summer go? Where did the months go? They all passed so quickly!

On this Labor day weekend, we look forward. Where will the autumn take us? On what new adventures is God inviting us? To what new places does God want to lead us? On what new adventures does God want to lead you? On what new adventures does God want to lead this Church? To what new places does God want to lead this nation? On what new adventures does God want to lead this world?

We are living on the cusp. We are living in a holy time. God calls. God invites. May we take off our shoes so that our feet are touching the holy ground. May we take off our shoes and follow where God wants to lead.