

SCRIPTURE

Revelation 20:4-6

Psalm 8

Matthew 16:21-28

21 From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. 22 And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." 23 But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. 26 For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? 27 For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. 28 Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

MESSAGE

My the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

As I prepared for this morning I did a fair bit of reading. I don't know if my high school history classes were wholly inadequate, or perhaps more likely that as a youth I was entirely remiss from my studies, but I quickly realized how little I know about the loyalists, and how profound an impact they have had on the area in which I have lived most of my life.

I grew up about an hour west of here; I was a London boy. London, of course, was founded by Lieutenant John Graves Simcoe, a Briton who led the Queens Rangers, a corps comprised mainly of Loyalists. I've got family ties here too, so I spent many weekends in Simcoe, whose name I recognized from the plaque back home at the forks of the Thames, but I never really thought too deeply on who Simcoe may have been.

The history ties together even more tightly in this building. This Presbyterian congregation traces its roots back to Jabez Collver, a minister with a bit of a sketchy past – my kind of character - who was a loyalist from New Jersey.

He moved into this area at the invitation of Simcoe and was granted 1000 acres of land, most of which was around Windham, just north of town, and spent his time as an itinerant preacher; a circuit rider who travelled the area with a horse and cart.

I was surprised to learn that loyalists weren't only British citizens who chose not to rebel in the American war of independence, but also were French and Dutch immigrants, Africans who had been brought to North America as slaves, and also some of the indigenous residents.

Joseph Brant, whose real name was Thayendanegea (various spellings), was a Mohawk born south of the current border, who organized Iroquois, and Seneca warriors to fight alongside Ranger detachments during the rebellion. We're familiar with his English name from the city and county north of us. He is also noted as the leader who negotiated the territories of Canada's largest reserve, the Six Nations reserve which was marked off as land for the natives displaced by the American Revolutionary War. Unfortunately the terms of that agreement have not been honored, which kept Thayendanegea/Brant busy up until his death, along with trying to enforce similar agreements south of the border. Brant was loyal to the crown, though the crown even though the crown was not fully loyal to him. That might be a sermon topic, though not the topic for today.

What I took from all my reading is that the loyalists generally were people who put principle ahead of property. As I dig into the history it seems pretty clear that for most of them it would have been much more profitable to back the rebels.

South of the border, these folks had land and holdings, businesses, family and community supports; a history and a place. To remain loyal to the crown, all that they had would be forfeit. They had to give it all up. Maybe some few were able to sell off some of their property before they left, but when the fires of war are burning and the future is uncertain it's not a sellers market. It's what brokers refer to as a distress sale – you lose your shirt.

When they settled here in Upper Canada, or in Lower Canada – Quebec and New Brunswick area – many did receive allotments of land, it may seem like a good deal to us. But imagine leaving behind an established farm with a house, barn, and animals and arriving here where you receive a plot of forest that has no road access and an axe. You better get busy because you have no shelter for your family, winter is coming, and you're in Canada now.

For most loyalists the move to Canada was not a step up – it was a sacrifice, and a big one. Many folks gave up everything. And why? Because they were convinced they were doing the right thing.

Now, I won't presume to know where God stands on the American War of Independence and the declaration of Canada as an independent country that followed many years later. I'm not sure that God favours one earthly kingdom over another so much as he wants to see our kingdoms follow the precepts of his heavenly kingdom and embrace the values of unity, restoration, and wholeness that Jesus lived, died, and continues to live for.

But, certainly this idea of laying down everything for a higher purpose is embodied in scripture. Sue read about that this morning. "If anyone desires to come after Me," said Jesus, "Let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." We are not to be afraid of suffering, and in fact when we choose to do what is right, often we will suffer for it.

Usually that's how we know something is right – because it comes at a cost. We lose our chance at a quick return, easy profit, at gaining some advantage or freedom without risk or responsibility. Usually what is right is not what is expedient or easy. Wide is the path that leads to destruction – it takes effort and intention to do good. Picking up a cross is not something we are naturally inclined to do. It's easier to compromise our beliefs, to let someone else carry the load.

But Jesus calls us to pick up a cross – the instrument of our own destruction – and willingly lose our lives. Give it all up, he says. Your security, your status, your possessions, your privilege; your desires. You've got to be willing to let go of it all.

These things that we hold onto are actually the cause of our own suffering; the fear of losing those things we hold dear makes us vulnerable, fearful, insecure. Loosen your grip, Jesus tells us. Don't rely on those things that are temporal.

And this is not merely a call to non-attachment. Non-attachment may reduce suffering, but it banishes joy at the same time. Dis-associative living is not Jesus' intent.

He says "Whoever loses their life for My sake will find it." We lay down all our attachments and claims, not because they are necessarily bad, but we lay down what is good for the sake of what is best. "For my sake." That is the critical qualifier. By letting go of all worldly things that drive us, we make room within ourselves to receive the spirit from God.

Jesus himself lived what he spoke. He gave up any hope at a normal life of working, raising a family, doing all those things that we think are the right way to live. Instead he found himself wandering from town to town, with no home of his own, no time for himself since he was always being pressed in on by crowds wanting healing, food, wisdom, just him. He gave up the desires of his life.

Ultimately he gave up life itself, allowing himself to be executed, carrying his own cross that he would die upon to the top of that hill.

Now, we know that the story didn't end there. The life that Jesus lay down, he later picked back up again. He lay down his temporal life to gain eternal life.

The reading from Revelation tells the same story – we hear of the martyrs, those who were beheaded because of their faith. They gave up their lives, they didn't bend the knee to lesser gods, they held true to the divine truth, and for that they have been rewarded.

So does that mean that we should all suffer now so that we get our reward after death? I'm no expert on heaven – I haven't been there yet, and I'm certainly not going to make any promises to you about what will happen to you when you die.

But I will tell you this: Jesus told us that all of our desires, all of our striving, should take its rightful place as being secondary to our pursuit of his eternal life; his divine spirit. What I understand this to

mean is that a life spent in service to anything less than the perfect divine truth is a life wasted. Why would we ever set our sights any lower than the absolute highest vision that has been revealed to us?

What profit is it to gain the whole world, and loses our own soul? Of what benefit is wealth, luxury, or power if we have no integrity? What an empty life it is when we have no higher purpose than trying to satisfy our own desires. That's where the spiral of self-consuming addiction begins.

So, enjoy the blessings that God has given you in this life, but hold them loosely. Be ready to give them up at a moments notice because your life is more than what you eat or what you wear. You are a divinely created being created with passion and purpose and your life has so much more value than the kingdoms of this world can possibly convey.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;
4 what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?

5 Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honor.

6 You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet,

7 all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,

8 the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

9 O Lord, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

I speak to you this morning in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.