May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

According to the google dictionary, the word “**Disillusion”** is defined as disappointment that you feel when you realize something you thought was true wasn't, or when you realize that something you thought was good is not as good as you believed it was.

Disillusion happens when the story we’ve told ourselves, the story on which we based our lives and beliefs, the story to which we committed ourselves, no longer makes sense, is no longer relevant, no longer works, or is no longer true. Disillusionment leaves us panicked and fearful about the future. The world feels like a dangerous and chaotic place, out of control.

Disillusionment, however, isn’t only about what’s going on around us. It begins within us. It’s a spiritual issue. And it’s one… Peter knows well. In today’s gospel he is the picture of disillusionment.

He’s confessed Jesus as the Messiah. He has a particular story about who the Messiah is and what the Messiah should do and be about. Who doesn’t? Jesus, however is about to undo and rewrite Peter’s story. “*The Son of Man*,” he says, “*must undergo great suffering and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again*.”

That’s neither what he expected nor what he wanted. So, he takes Jesus aside and rebukes him, as if he knows more and better than Jesus. In Matthew’s version of this story we hear what Peter says to Jesus. “*God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you*” (Mt. 16:22).

Can you see and hear Peter’s disillusionment? Peter confesses and Peter rebukes, all with the same tongue in the same conversation. He’s speaking with a forked tongue, or as a friend of mine says, out of both sides of his mouth. It’s what James is describing in today’s epistle (James 3:1-12).

Listen to the disillusionment in your own life or in the life of another and you’ll likely hear blessing and cursing coming from the same mouth. “With” the tongue, James says, “*we bless the Lord and Father, and we curse those who are made in the likeness of God*.”

“*My brothers and sisters*,” James continues, “*this ought not to be so*.” We know that, right? Our disillusionment is not an excuse to curse or rebuke another. It’s not a basis for claiming we know more and better than another. And it is not a reason to declare or treat the other as less than us when that other has been created and loved by the same God who created and loves us.

“*Get behind me, Satan*,” Jesus says. Those are the same words Jesus spoke during his temptations in the wilderness. Jesus hears Peter’s rebuke as a temptation to be less than who he is and as a distraction from the work he is about. Maybe that’s true for Peter, and for you and me. Disillusion tempts us to be less than who we truly are, tempts us to be arrogant, tempts us to lose sight of what we are really about.

In our disillusionment we often put our story in front of God’s story, give more credence to what we see than what God sees, and take our story to be more real than God’s story. Isn’t that what Peter has done? In our panicked arrogance we can easily and quickly betray ourselves, each other, and God.

The truth is we don’t understand what is happening and we feel lost, scared, angry, and confused. The old story of power no longer fits. It never did but we heard that story and told it to ourselves enough times that we began to believe and invest in it. We need to embrace a different story. Jesus gives Peter and us a new story. It’s a story of self-denial. “*If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves, take us theirs cross and follow me*.” It’s not just a story that Jesus tells. It’s the story he lives and if any want to become his followers it must become their story.

What if self-denial is about separating from that which we often use to define ourselves and each other; political parties, national identity, family of origin, even religion? What if it is about redefining ourselves, our priorities, and our beliefs to be more in line with those of Jesus? What if self-denial is the key to loving our neighbor, our enemy, God, and even ourselves? Maybe self-denial is what makes space and place for another and recognizes her or his life as important and sacred as ours. Maybe self-denial is, paradoxically, what allows us to come alive. Maybe it means re-examining our beliefs and attitudes about who we are, who another is, and who God is. And, finally, maybe self-denial means we don’t take ourselves more seriously than we take God. Amen.