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## Outcomes

The Rev. Susan Sommer

It's hard to wrap our heads around the devastation on the Gulf Coast, and we're not alone. All over the country, compassionate folks are horrified by this disaster. And it's been gratifying to see the outpouring of money and volunteer labor. We Americans tend to be a goal-oriented, future-focused, linear bunch. We roll up our sleeves and open our wallets, and get 'er done. Because we tend to be all about outcomes. Our school curricula, our performance reviews at work, the way sports teams are coached, the way we put a new roof on the church, it's all focused on outcomes. It's how we live, and it's hard for many of us to imagine NOT living that way.

And Peter, in today's gospel passage, is our poster boy. Now, assuredly, Peter was not a 21<sup>st</sup> century American. We cannot know what Peter actually thought when Jesus predicted his crucifixion. But we can put ourselves in his shoes when we hear this gospel passage. And when we do, we can imagine that Jesus being crucified was not the outcome Peter had signed on for. In last week's gospel, Peter identified Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. And as Fr. Tom reminded us, the Messiah was envisioned as a military leader, like the great King David. Meanwhile, Son of God was the title given to the emperor by the Gentiles. So in both the Jewish and Gentile contexts, the Messiah, the Son of God, is supposed to be the victor, not the one who dies. And those who follow such a messiah are supposed to be swept along in that marvelous national victory. That's the desired outcome, not this business of denying self and taking up one's cross.

We can understand Peter's confusion. He witnessed – heck, he participated in – some amazing miracles. Jesus feeding a multitude with 5 loaves and 2 fish. Jesus walking on the water. Jesus healing a Canaanite woman's daughter by a spoken word. Wow! Imagine our world today if Jesus had actually been all about outcomes! He wouldn't have just fed the multitude for a day, he'd have eliminated hunger permanently. He wouldn't have just healed a young girl once, he would have eliminated diseases. If Jesus were about outcomes, he could drain the floodwaters along the Gulf Coast and stop the rain from falling with a spoken word. Dang! If only Jesus had been about outcomes!

Thing is, outcomes are our job. It's why God gave us big giant heads with a prefrontal cortex – to figure this stuff out. It's why we are sent as disciples into the world. Jesus's ministry sets the context for that discipleship. His teaching undergirds the outcomes that our discipleship can and often does, blessedly, bring about. Jesus's message is that of hope. Hope in the eternal power of the resurrection which God accomplishes through him for all of us. But there's a pre-requisite to resurrection that we outcomes-oriented folk don't like to think about. Death. It isn't that God