

## Written Copy: Matthew 16:22-26 “Cross Carrying Disciples”

Proper 17-13<sup>th</sup> Sunday @ Pentecost

Sunday, August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020

### Text: Matthew 16:22-26

<sup>22</sup> And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." <sup>23</sup> But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." <sup>24</sup> Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. <sup>26</sup> For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?"

### Exegetical Statement

Directly following Peter's confession of faith, given him from the Father that Jesus "is the Christ, the Son of the Living God", Jesus begins to point out to His Disciples what that will mean for Him and them, the reason why He was sent to earth. Because it is the Father's will and plan: He must go to Jerusalem, suffer at the hands of the Jewish and Roman leaders, be killed, and rise again. The same Disciple who gave the divine confession now reveals what his will and plan is concerning Jesus in Jerusalem, and it stands in opposition to what Jesus just revealed. According to Peter what Jesus just revealed must never happen. But the will and desires of man always stand in opposition to the Father. And Peter unknowingly is giving voice to the same temptations the devil in the wilderness suggesting Jesus take a path of glory to call His followers to Himself. Jesus strongly scolds and warns Peter that he is speaking for Satan and against God's will and plan. Then to all the Disciples who have been called Jesus says that His followers must deny their own plans, will, and dreams of heaven on earth and instead be ready to take up their own cross of suffering that comes when they put God first, and others second ahead of themselves. Preserving their earthly existence at all costs will cost them eternal life to come, as they make their will replace God's will for them. But by giving up the life the world holds as its goal the Disciple gains a life of cross bearing lived with Christ now, and eternal life to come. That is a life for which the world offers nothing in exchange that can compare. Those who trade in the life of discipleship with cross bearing for the pleasures of the world now will be given the return payment for their opposition to God's will on the Last Day when Jesus returns to judge what each man has done with His gift of faith. A life lived apart from God now earns an eternal existence apart from Him in the suffering of the Eternal Lake of Fire.

### Focus Statement:

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God who came to give the ultimate gift of self-sacrifice, suffering torture, humiliation, and finally death to pay for all the ways we refuse God's will for us. He grants us His Spirit who by giving us His love moves us to live for God first and others second with the promise of a life free from suffering in eternity.

### Function Statement:

#### Why it's important to know:

We see life as centered around our wants, needs, plans, and desires with God there to intercede when things go wrong and are beyond our fixing. The life that we are called to live as Disciples of self-denial/sacrifice and cross carrying makes no sense and is incompatible with our will apart from the Holy Spirit

#### What the hearer should do as a result:

Through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit deny our will to live a life of self-pleasure/self-service and instead in humility serve God by serving others. An example would be in the upcoming election voting not to benefit ourselves but in the interest of those who have no voice: the unborn, the homeless, those suffering racial injustice, victims of the violent unrest.

### Subject Sentence: Disciples deny their will and live to serve others

## Introduction

Perhaps some of you were wondering if the Apostle Peter might make an appearance last Sunday, as he did several weeks ago to give us his take on Jesus' miraculous walking on water. After all, last week's Gospel Lesson was one of his shining moments, in contrast to the moment we made him relive, his "O Ye of Little Faith Moment", sinking in the water even as he stood before Jesus. Last Sunday, through the Father's revelation to him, Peter gives voice to the confession that is the bedrock that the Church is built on: that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God!" As far as shining moments go, it doesn't get any better for Peter in the Pre-Resurrection period.

And if there really was some way for me to talk to Peter, and possibly to coax him into making an appearance, it probably wouldn't be to relive this Gospel Lesson. There is something about being called "Satan" by your Lord and Savior that makes it an unpleasant memory to relive. While we understand from our viewpoint today why it was necessary for Jesus to suffer, die, and rise on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, things were not so clear from where Peter sat back then. Even so, here we have another moment where Jesus seems to be speaking out of character. Why was His response so hard and cold? Would He ever respond in a similar manner to Christians today? Would He ever respond in a similar manner to you or me? How ready are you and I really to do what He tells His Disciples to do: to deny ourselves, pick up our cross, and follow Him?

### Peter's Will vs. The Father's Will

This scene takes place directly after Peter's confession of faith in who Jesus is. But it's not just connected in a chronological sense. What Peter says to Jesus in this reading, and how Jesus responds, needs to be seen in light of that confession.

Peter had confessed Jesus to be the "Anointed One", The Messiah, the One promised from the line of David, but also to be the divine Son of the Living God. But what did that really mean for Jesus ministry on earth? What did it mean for these Disciples who were called to follow Him? Jesus is beginning to answer those questions when in **Matthew 16:21** "**From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.**"

Notice that Jesus being the Messiah sent from the Father means that He **must** go to Jerusalem. He **must** suffer many things at the hands of the Jewish rulers and religious leaders. He **must** be killed. And then on the third day He **must** rise again. Why **must** He do these things? It is the plan of Salvation that has been in the works and building up to this very point ever since the Fall. It is the Father's plan and will that these things happen to the Son. The Son has come to earth and been born of a virgin, so that He could grow to be the God Man. And as the Man who is also the Divine Son of God suffer physical, emotional, and spiritual torture in our place and suffer death. He must do these things to redeem mankind. He must do these things to redeem you and I from suffering eternal death. It's why He came.

But this is not what is on Peter's agenda. **Matthew 16: 22 And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you."** Peter hears Jesus say that going to Jerusalem means He will suffer and die. Whether or not the being raised on the third day registered with him or not we don't know. But this is not the scenario that Peter envisions for Jesus upon entering into Jerusalem. He has just confessed Jesus to be the Messiah. He is the One prophesied about in **2 Samuel 7:12-13** <sup>12</sup> **When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.** <sup>13</sup> **He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.**

So Peter pulls Jesus off to one side to have a quiet chat with Him. Peter wants to straighten Him out on the role Scripture says Messiah is to fulfill. Peter is saying, "Look, Jesus; You know I just received the skinny on who you are and what you're here for. You're the Messiah! When we get to Jerusalem this is the time for you to claim what is rightfully yours! It's the time when you ride in as the King in the line of David and bring back together the Kingdom of Israel in all its glory. I mean you can do all these fantastic miracles. You're not going to suffer and die! May that never happen to you! Instead may the outcome of your arrival be what is favorable and merciful in the Father's sight.

Peter wanted what was favorable and merciful for Jesus because that would also be what was favorable and merciful for him and the other disciples. They believed that as Jesus sat on the throne ruling the restored Kingdom of Israel, they would sit next to him as princes in the kingdom. Rome kept the peace but in a very heavy-handed way. The Jews were an occupied nation and while allowed to worship the LORD in their traditional way they had to pay taxes and be servants of the Roman Soldiers. They longed for a better life. They longed to be free once again. They longed to be the superpower that they once were under David. They longed to be free from paying taxes and jumping every time they were ordered to by a Roman soldier. They wanted to be happy in this life once again.

We too long for a happy life. We desire health, wealth, and success. Many of us have worked hard to provide for ourselves in retirement. We have regular doctor's visits and take our prescribed medication to extend the quality and years of our life as much as modern medicine will allow. And these are in and of themselves not bad things. But they can lead us to have a Peter-like view on what this world should be for us. It's a view that many younger people both inside and outside the Church hold to. That view claims that the goal for our lives lived out on earth is to be happy and feel good about ourselves and our accomplishments. God wants us to be good and nice to each other, and if we are, He will bless us. He is always on call for those times problems develop such as accident, injury, sickness, even plagues. He wants nothing other than for us to be happy and will always work for our earthly success. And when things are going well, He should fade into the background and lets us live our lives, while providing forgiveness for those times our happiness violates His commandments. He forgives our sins because He wants us to be happy with our life now. And more accurately He wants "me" to be happy in my life now. Or you (singularly) to be happy in your life now. Because if your happy than most others will be happy too; right? Peter thought so.

But the problem with Peter's will and plan for what happens to Jesus is that it stood in direct opposition to what the Father and the Son say absolutely must happen. Peter is putting forth a plan of action that Jesus has heard before. **Matthew 4:8-9** **8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. 9 And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."** Jesus was being tempted with the easy way out. Just show up and all the people will fall on their knees and worship You. Now Peter's plan didn't include Jesus worshipping Satan per se. But it did mean opposing the will of the Father in direct obedience. And who is Satan? The Adversary. The one who always opposes the will of God. And that's what Peter was doing.

In His wilderness temptation in **Matthew 4:10** **"Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve."** In **Matthew 16:23** **Jesus "turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."** Now Peter has not been possessed by Satan. But in opposing the will of God he is speaking for Satan. Jesus is making this connection clear. "Peter, by suggesting and urging me to violate the Father's will you are working for Satan himself. You are tempting me in the same way. You are hindering me from doing what I came to do, and if I was to follow what you want, I would fall into Satan's trap that would mean mankind would be lost in sin forever. Removed yourself from a leading position and get behind me. Instead of telling me what you think I should do go back to following what I say must happen. You want the sinful selfish desire of your heart to be fulfilled. You want the Kingdom of Israel restored just like many of these others that follow me. You want what seems good for you now. But that would be eternally destructive for all mankind."

**Matthew 16:24** Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. What does it mean to follow Jesus as His Disciple? What does it mean to be a member of His Church, one of His "Called Out Ones"-called out of the kingdom of the devil and into the Kingdom of the Son of God? It means denying one's self. Denying what? Denying those things, and plans, and values, and loves that stand opposed to the will and plan of God for you. Our hearts are corrupted by sin, and therefore make our desires self-centered. I want is what's best for me now. We want what is best for us now. And along with that we believe that what's best for us now will naturally be best for all people, even if they don't understand that now. But our sinful heart's desires always stand opposed to what the Lord wants for us, the LORD who knows what we truly need now and into the future as well as our neighbor. As Christians part of our taking up our cross is to live a life of service; not in serving ourselves, but in serving God first and others second. This usually means a sacrifice on our part. And that means picking up the cross. But according to our sinful heart we will always balk at this. Instead we stand where Peter stood, opposing the will of God by desiring what we want and not what He knows we need.

## **Why Jesus Denied Himself and Carried His Cross**

That's why it was necessary for Jesus to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the Jews and the Romans, be put to death, and then to rise from death on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Day. He denied the life and future that His sinless obedience to the Father earned for Him. He was the King of Kings and Lord of Lords and deserved to sit on a throne and be worshiped as such. But He denied that right and privilege when He came to earth to be born as a human baby. He set aside the glory and power that were His as the Son of God and became the humble servant of all men. He came to serve as the sacrifice for sin for you and me. He came to take away what you owe God every time your thoughts, words, and actions follow your own sinful selfish will in opposition to God's will. He came to forgive you for every time your will earns the remark from Jesus: "Get behind me Satan". For all the times you and I refuse to put God first and others second in our plans and purposes, Jesus put the Father's will and plan first, and our eternal salvation second, by suffering and dying for you and me. All those times of disobedience have been removed from your record. When Jesus returns on the Last Day, you will not be required to give payment for your sins with eternity spent in hell. Instead you will receive the reward Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection earned for you, eternal life lived in the place where you will have true and full eternal happiness.

## **How Are We to Deny Ourselves and Carry Our Cross?**

As those who have been called into His kingdom and given this wonderful gift of grace, how are we to live out our lives on earth as His Disciples? How are we to live as His precious children who confess this to be the truth to live by: **Matthew 16:25-26** <sup>25</sup> **For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.** <sup>26</sup> **For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?** We are called to live a life of humble service in obedience to God's will. We are called to put Him first place in our lives and others 2<sup>nd</sup>. We are to live a life that means giving up and letting go of those things the world declares important. We are to lose the kind of life where we please ourselves first, and then if it's not too painful work on pleasing our neighbor. We are to lose the "me first life" and in return, by faith, we begin to live the humble servant life of a Disciple: a Jesus first and our neighbor 2<sup>nd</sup> life.

It's a life of sacrifice that extends to all our vocations-all the roles in life where God has placed us. This is deep and is something that deserves meditation on your part during this week. But with the elections fast approaching I would invite you to consider what this means to us as Christians who are given the right and privilege to vote. We generally vote for the candidate that promises to make our lives better for us now. Sometimes this comes at the expense of others. Some of those benefits we may hope to receive from said candidates for federal, state, and local offices might not be in the best interests of others. We as the Church are called to consider and speak for the rights of those who do not have a voice: the poor and homeless, those are subjected to racial discrimination, those who are suffering from the violence played out in cities across the country by those who think only of themselves, and the unborn- whose lives are cut short in the womb by those who choose to see them as less than human, having no rights. By considering these people when we vote, by putting their needs ahead of our own, we may actually be voting to make our particular situation worse. We may be choosing a candidate that is not in our best interest. We may be sacrificing the life in the world that we desire. You know what Jesus would call that? Denying yourself, picking up your cross, and following Him. He would call it loving others as much as you love yourself.

## **Conclusion**

It's not an easy thing when you think about it that way, is it? That's why Peter couldn't do it on his own, even after being given the confession of faith the Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Even after Jesus told him that His suffering and death in Jerusalem is what must happen according to the Father's will. Even after pointing out that Peter's will and plan was in alignment not with Jesus but with Satan. Peter would still struggle He would exclaim that he was willing to die with Jesus, but when the possibility arose that he might have to suffer with Jesus, Peter instead put himself first and denied Jesus three times. But Jesus didn't give up on Peter. He came to him after He rose from the dead and made sure Peter knew he was forgiven. And in the end Peter was willing to give up his life for his faith in Christ.

You and I will struggle with living the life Jesus calls His disciples to live. We are to deny our will and our selfish plans, and instead be willing to live sacrificially according to God's will. We are called to live in faith toward Him and in fervent love toward one another. We do this not to be saved, not to make God love us more. We do this because we have been saved because Jesus loved you so much that He gave His life for you, and rose from the grave so you could know you have been made eternally right with Him. We struggle with this sacrificial living and fail at it each day. And every time we recognize our failure, the word from Jesus is "You are forgiven. Pick up your cross and keep following me." The gift of His Spirit through the Word and the Sacraments gives you the power to do this, and keep doing this, until Jesus comes to take you home with Him. Amen