

Sermon for Sunday Pentecost 13
Matthew 16:21-28
Crosses of Love

Grace, Peace, and mercy from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

It is an old saying, "It was not the nails that held Jesus to the cross. It was His love that held Jesus to the cross. It was for our sake.

Jesus must go to the cross. It must be the way. His love for you and me would not allow any other way. Jesus could do nothing less. It is for your forgiveness, your restored relationship with God, for your eternal life, and to give you hope.

It would be His doing. Even if the chief priest, the elders, the scribes would be involved, to cause Him to be betrayed, arrested, mocked and suffer many things. To be flogged at the hands of the Romans, and be crucified under Pontius Pilate. All this would not have happened had He not allowed it. In another time and another place Jesus had told His disciples concerning His life, "No one takes takes it from me, I lay down my life on my own accord." That is what the Good Shepherd does for the sheep. He does for sake of the sheep. He does it for your sake. Why because of His perfect love for you.

But Peter hearing this responds, "God Forbid! it shall not be so!" Peter rejects the cross, and in rejecting the cross Peter is rejecting God's love in Jesus Christ for Him and the world. Let us give Peter a little bit of a break. After confessing Jesus as Messiah he does not know what that would mean. Being killed is weakness. Peter doesn't understand Jesus' death and resurrection, Jesus did also say He would be raised on the 3rd day, Jesus ascension and giving of the HS has not yet happened which would bring them understanding and revelation of many things concerning Jesus.

So when Jesus rebukes Peter, "Get behind me Satan, you are not on the side of God, but on the side of men," seems a bit harsh. Jesus is right of course. Satan wants to derail or vanquish God's love. Satan would love to keep Jesus off the cross. He tied in the desert in the temptation by offering Jesus an easier path to His Kingship. So Satan wants to stop Jesus at every turn if he can and it looks like Satan is using Peter in this attempt.

For Peter the cross is weakness. Jesus can accomplish God's purpose through public displays of power, a messianic army if you will. But as Jesus reminds Peter, that is the way of man. It is not God's way. It is the cross for Jesus and He would not let it be otherwise. This is His love for Peter, and the disciples and He would not have it any other way. That is the power of Jesus' love even for the those who pounded the nails, those who mock Him, those who divide His garments, as Jesus prays, "Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing."

There is forgiveness for them and for you too. There is life for you and hope for you. Jesus has done it all. You get forgiveness each time you repent and confess your sins. It happens every Sunday. You have been baptized into His death and resurrection so that your life does not end in death. He feeds you with His Word and lives in you. No matter what you have done, what mistakes you have made, the power of Jesus' love on the that cross has the power to wipe all that away.

Though we may not speak up the way Peter did, we would never tell Jesus to avoid the cross, for we know how it ends. The crucifixion ends in Jesus' resurrection and hope for eternal life. That is the gospel we all need to hear. It is the gospel everyone in this community needs to hear.

But there is little thing that need to be said. Satan continues to thwart God's love. He tempts us to say no to the cross in our own lives. When Jesus invites us to take up the cross and follow Him we might say, "No this shall never happen to me!" Of course these are words of the old sinner in each of us. These are words that make us want to indulge ourselves, and not deny our selves. Words that want God to gives us what we want when we want it. Words that confirm our desire to lead my own life the way I want to and not follow. Words that say, I am in charge instead of letting God be in charge. It is actually putting love of self before God. A cross? For me? No thank you! That doesn't fit into my plan.

Like Peter, that is like rejecting God's love and His way. And that ends in losing your life.

I read a story in the Cotton Patch Gospel, by Clarence Jordan, About his visit to large downtown church. They him the grand tour. The front doors, 10,000 dollars. The stained glass windows, 17, 000 dollar each. These pews made from oak, cost 15,0000 dollars. After they had been through the building the people came to their pride and joy. It was a cross. Large and Gold and beautiful on top of the steeple. "Here it is our cross and it cost half a million dollars. Clarence look at them and told them, "You got ripped off. Jesus is giving those for free.

Maybe that is the point. The love of Jesus shown on His cross is free for your taking. But in taking it up means picking up your own cross, and dying to your old way of pride, sins, and our self-indulgent appetites, and our I know best how to lead my life and I am charge mind set of the old sinner in me. All that needs to die so that new life may come forth.

Jesus speaks of our cross after he speaks of His cross. They are both connected or they have no meaning. IF they are not connected then we may see God as angry ready to punish us and toy with us. That is what happens when the cross gets buried in our business. We lose sight of God's love for us that He won for us. It is the cross of Christ love is where our sins got buried and releases us from sin's guilt. It where you see your forgiveness and life, ad most especially Christ's love.

So the cross that Jesus invites us to take up is given by a loving life-giving God not take your life but to save it. To have you turn to the Holy Cross of Christ and see his love for you and your forgiveness and salvation. To to die the old sin sinful self and receive the new life that transforms us to be be God's loving people. What does this look like?

Loving one another, blessing those that persecute us, overcoming evil with good, letting our love be genuine. And this import ant. We do these not to save our selves. We do these because we are saved! Because we have been set free from the burden of sin and it's guilt and the need to save our selves. It is carrying the cross of Christ's love to others who need hope and meaning in this life. Sometimes it may mean laying down our life for them, sticking up for them when they are ridiculed. It is in this way that losing our life, our old life we gain the new life in Christ.

So do not be afraid to give yourselves to others. That is Christ's Love in you. That is Christ for you. This a life that will not run out. You cannot out give god. And in it you find the life that our Lord intends for you.

In Jesus name, Amen.