

Matthew 16:21-28 – Pentecost 14.A 2023

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

Peter goes from being the Rock on which Jesus will build His Church to being called Satan in a matter of ten minutes.

If anything, from what we heard last Sunday to what we heard today, this should give us a picture of the Christian life. If you think that the Christian life like learning to ride a bicycle, once you learn you never forget. Once you learn the steady progress to the ultimate goal of heaven is under way, no miss-steps, no falling down, and no veering off the path. As we all have figured out this is not so. This gospel should give us something to something the reflect on for a lifetime.

Peter and the other 11 disciples had heard the call to repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Heard Jesus teaching the Sermon on the Mount, witnessed up close Jesus casting out demons, healing the sick, and demonstrating His divine authority by calming storms. Then Jesus asks the question to the disciples, “Who do you say that I am.” Peter responds, “You are the Christ, Son of the Living God.” Jesus commends Peter having gotten it right. Peter nailed it.

I heard the other day that faith is like jumping from a cliff onto a passing pickup truck traveling 60 mph and landing on top of a spinning ball perfectly like a skilled ballerina. Impossible for flesh and blood like us. Only through God’s power could something like this be accomplished.

So, it was with Peter’s confession. Jesus reminds Peter that he did not get this on his own power, but it had been revealed to him by His father in heaven. To confess Jesus as Christ, Son of the Living God is not a flesh and blood kind of thing. This goes to show us that faith and our confession of faith is a gift from God. Through the revelation from the Father in heaven Peter got who Jesus is. It is this proclamation, this Apostolic message of Jesus is Christ, God’s anointed Son is the sure foundation on which Jesus builds His Church. The Confession is rock solid.

Peter lands on the who of Jesus. It is the “How” that becomes the scandal for Peter. “From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and the chief priests and scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised.”

Then Peter took Jesus aside and began to Rebuke Jesus. "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you!" That sounds different from the way it should go. God's Messiah suffer, be killed? No way! The people will welcome You with open arms and then you can set up the golden era of the Kingdom and we shall all live in peace after you have delivered us from our enemies. Then you can reign in glory, and we can experience your consist blessing. Peter and gotten the Who, but the how Jesus would accomplish he completely missed.

It has been quite a few weeks for Peter. A few weeks ago we heard about the disciples struggling on the Sea when they saw Jesus walking on the water but were frightened because they thought he was ghost. But Jesus said, "Do not fear, I Am." Peter shouts out, "if it is you, bid me to come to you on the water." Jesus takes him up on the offer and says, "Come." And Peter does and he is walking on the water. All is going well until Peter sees that the waves are high and feels the strong wind and begins to sink. Peter cries to Jesus as goes under and Jesus reaches down and lifts Peter in the boat.

Peter had done this when it came to the who of Jesus. He nailed the landing on the spinning ball so to speak only by God's power. "You are the Christ, Son of the Living God."

When Jesus revealed the how, "Suffer many things at the hands of the religious leaders, and be killed, and be raised on the third day." No, God forbid! Peter missed the landing here and finds himself on the side of the road, all broken. Jesus says, "Get behind me Satan. You are a scandal to me. You are trying to trip me up like Satan tried to trip me up in the wilderness. You are thinking in the ways of man. You are not on my side. You are not thinking in the ways of God. Peter and His disciples are going to need lifting up and put straight to get on the same page as our Lord.

So, it is with you and I in our Christian life. There are days when I feel and think I got this. I am progressing well in this Christian life like riding my bike. Then I get too full of myself. As a kid in my bike riding days I would take a plank of wood and prop it on a few bricks and pretend I was Evel Knievel trying jump 10 Semis lined up end to end. A few times I found myself on the street all skinned up with scrapes and bruises from not nailing the landing.

In our Christian life we like Peter may get who Jesus is but the how we might miss. Just because I am Baptized and believe I have it made with no suffering, steady progress, and growth. When suffering hits and I doubt in God's goodness, or I get too full of myself and rely on my own works, fall for worldly things I find myself back at square one.

Jesus says, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it and those who lose their life will find it." Deny yourself; that is your self-interest, reliance on my own works, and my own confidence that I am a good person.

Then to fall at the foot of the cross in repentance and confession. And it is there where life is found. For it is the cross that where Jesus would be killed to win life for you. Life forever. Life even now. Forgiveness of all your sins. All washed away. A clean slate. A new life of faith and love given through the work of the Holy Spirit where this Gospel is proclaimed. Through this cross is the victory of God In Christ through the rising of His Son Jesus. We have access to our Father in Heaven who hears our prayers and is with us in our ups and downs and through all the changes and chances that life brings us, He lifts us up, gives us the strength to endure. When we veer from the way the Gospel calls back to Himself.

To pick up your cross. Doing so letting the love of God be shown toward one another with mutual affection, when one suffers you suffer with them, by showing honor to each other, patiently enduring with another, staying constant in prayer and giving up what I want when I want it.

This morning's lesson began, "From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering..." All for our salvation. His disciples have much to learn on the way to Jerusalem, through the crucifixion and resurrection. So, it is with us. Our faith journey continues and for the next several Sundays and through lifetime Jesus will continue to show us and teach us more of this life of faith and discipleship. Come and be forgiven, refreshed, encouraged, renewed, strengthened, and to be brought to the peace that passes all human understanding, guard your heart and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.