

## **Matthew 16: 15-18, 21-28**

The holy gospel according to Matthew  
**Glory to you, O Lord.**

[Jesus] said to [his disciples,] "But who do you say that I am?" <sup>16</sup>Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." <sup>17</sup>And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. <sup>18</sup>And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it..."

<sup>21</sup>From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. <sup>22</sup>And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." <sup>23</sup>But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

<sup>24</sup>Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup>For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. <sup>26</sup>For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?"

<sup>27</sup>For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. <sup>28</sup>Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

The gospel of the Lord.  
**Praise to you, O Christ.**

Rev. Lynne Ogren  
August 30, 2020

Zion Lutheran Church, Lewistown, MT  
13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, Year A  
Romans 12:1-2, 9-12; Matthew 16:15-18, 21-28

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

We have not been paying much attention to Paul's letter to the Romans this summer. We are already in chapter 12, the chapter that serves as a turning point in this letter, just as chapter 16 does in Matthew's gospel.

In the first eleven chapters Paul teaches the believers in Rome about God's grace and faithfulness and how they are available to all people, both Jews and Greeks. The word "therefore" in the first verse of chapter 12 signals a shift from what God has done for us to how we are called to respond to these gifts.

Three-quarters of the letter speaks to God's goodness and expansive welcome to all people. These last few chapters teach believers how we are to embody and share that goodness with the world.

This is the life Jesus refers to when he tells poor Peter and the others that we are to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him. Just when Peter thought he had things figured out, that Jesus was the promised Messiah who had come to set God's people free, Jesus starts talking nonsense, saying that he would suffer, be killed, and rise again.

The expectation was that the Messiah would come with power to overthrow the political powers of the world. A messiah like that would not suffer or be killed by those same powers—let alone the leaders of their own people, the chief priests and scribes, the ones he had come to save.

Peter can't believe what he's hearing from Jesus, so he says that outright. "No way! No how! God would never let that happen to his own Son!"

In one moment, Jesus praises Peter for his faith and understanding. In the next he accuses him of speaking the words of Satan, meaning his adversary or enemy.

Of course, that was not Peter's intention, to oppose Jesus. He was probably his biggest supporter. Jesus gets serious with his followers, and from now on he will show them what it means to live in and live out the kingdom of God he brought near to the world.

Embodying the ways of the kingdom will mean walking in the way of the cross. It will mean enduring suffering as we engage in a life that is so different from the world and its self-serving ways. It will mean dying to our instinct to protect and save ourselves. AND the way of the cross will mean entering into new life, a life made possible by Christ's own resurrection.

Paul's letter teaches in more specific ways the path Jesus sets for us in his journey to the cross. Jesus' sacrifice was the giving of his bodily life to death. Paul calls believers to become "a living sacrifice," or embodying a way of life that seeks to "live peaceably with all." We may need to sacrifice our own comfort and our reluctance to act in order to give our life for the life and well-being of those around us.

But is this reasonable? Can we really genuinely love one another and express honor to those who are different from us as much as to those who agree with us or who look like us?

I saw an interview on the news this week with a young black woman who said she no longer cries. She has put up with hate and rejection all her life. She has been taught to be strong in the face of evil. But now she can no longer express true emotion when hurtful words and actions are thrown at her. Her stoic words broke my heart.

When Jesus tells believers to deny themselves and take up their cross, and Paul teaches that we are to live peaceably with all, we might think of someone like this woman who has confronted very real enemies in her life. But those who are abused and put down by the world should not have to carry the burden of showing honor and patience in suffering alone.

It is the calling of all God's people to live the kingdom life, to cultivate a culture of care and respect, especially as it surrounds and supports those who suffer the most.

As Jesus turned toward Jerusalem, he knew that his suffering and death would be the consequence to living out the kingdom of God.

For those who would follow Jesus, the way of the cross is not an easy way to live. It takes incredible strength of character, intention, and faith. So, we remember that when Paul outlines this Christian life, he is writing to a community of believers. We are not meant to take up the cross of the kingdom of God alone.

I'd like to show you a piece of art I found in the Sunday School wing this week. I don't know the lesson that brought it about, but it is a beautiful representation for us today of our cross-formed life.

Each of these individual crosses carries its own giftedness, its own burdens, and its own callings to live as a follower of Christ. Think about some of the ways we are to deny ourselves and take up the cross that will lead to new life.

This person might set aside their own political views to truly listen to someone who sees things differently. Then their response can be spoken with love and respect, even if the two never come to agreement.

Another cross might represent a person who volunteers in a social service agency to bring help to those who struggle to put food on the table—week after week, month after month, year after year. It would be easy to judge those who come looking for help, but this person is called to contribute to the needs in the world with grace and mercy.

How are you facing conflict or discord in your life? How is the brokenness in the world breaking your heart? Welcoming strangers, loving the unlovable, caring for the poor and the outcast will lead to suspicion and rejection in a world that seeks the good-for-self over the good of the other.

In the prayer before Holy Communion we outline his faithful obedience as he "reached out to heal the sick and suffering, who preached good news to the poor, and who, on the cross, opened his arms to all." This is the cross-shaped life Jesus is calling us to follow.

The shape of the cross points us heavenward, setting our minds on God's will and ways so that we receive strength from Christ to follow him. And that means our cross-shaped living will inevitably result in our own suffering and rejection. It is our relationship with Christ, individually and as a community, that grounds us as we minister to a world in need of God's love and grace.

We are each called to reach out to the sick and suffering, to bring good news to the poor, and to open our arms to all. And in Christian community the Holy Spirit forms a culture in which we support one another and take up the shared calling of the cross together.

With Peter we naturally want to push back on Jesus' call to follow the way of the cross. This call is for the church Jesus built upon Peter's declaration that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.

In great love Jesus came to into the world to save us from the powers that bring only death and division. Jesus' suffering and death led to a life that frees us to love so generously, a love that takes up the suffering of the world and addresses the enemies of hate and fear.

This is the life we share as God's beloved children—a life of love that seeks to live peaceably with all. Let us share this way of the cross together, for the sake of a world yearning for God's complete love for all people.

Thanks be to God! Amen



## **PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

Confident of God's care and helped by the Holy Spirit, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

God of faithfulness, you bid your people to follow Jesus. Set the mind of your church on divine things. Grant us trust in you, that we lose our lives for the sake of Christ and thereby discover joy in life through him. Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

God of wonder, the earth is yours and all that is in it. Heal your creation and give us eyes to see the world as you do. Restore places ravaged by fire and hurricanes this week and bless firefighters and relief agencies as they respond with courage. Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

God of all nations, you call us to live peaceably with all. Give us ears to hear one another, even those we name as enemies. Fill all leaders with mercy and understanding, that they advocate and genuinely care for those who are poor and most vulnerable in their communities. Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

God of salvation, you promise to deliver us. Give those who suffer a strong sense of your presence and love. Accompany those who are uncertain, raise the spirits of those who are despairing, and heal the sick. Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

God of community, you call us to rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, and persevere in prayer. Make our congregation a workshop of your love. Bless the efforts of LoveINC, the Salvation Army, Lutheran World Relief, and all of our ministry partners as extensions of the work you have given us to do. Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

In the certain hope that nothing can separate us from your love, we offer these prayers to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
**Amen.**