



Pentecost 13-August 30, 2020
Baltic and East Nidaros Parish
Matthew 16:21-28

Rock to Stumbling Block

Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

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

*Today's gospel begins with the words "From that time on". These words indicate that Jesus' ministry has turned a corner and is heading in a new direction immediately after Peter confessed that Jesus is the Messiah--the message which we heard last week. Jesus' focus turns from saving the lives of people by temporarily healing them in this life to establishing eternal life through his suffering, death, burial, and resurrection. Jesus doesn't just tell his disciples how this will happen, but he will also show them. As Jesus tells his disciples about his plan for salvation, he doesn't ask for their opinions. Nor does Jesus offer several options for them to vote on or choose from as he begins this turn in this ministry. Jesus clearly says there is only one way. Jesus said **he MUST** go to Jerusalem where **he** will suffer, be killed and on the third day be raised.*

Not only is there a change in what Jesus is doing now, but there is even a more dramatic change in Peter's name. Peter who Jesus had just called the solid rock, now Jesus calls a stumbling block. This change happens so quickly. Peter must have felt blindsided and wondered what had just happened. Peter's name changed when the words from Peter's mouth changed from "Lord Save Me" to "God Forbid it Lord". Jesus told Peter, "Get behind me Satan". Peter substituted the Lord's plan for salvation with something else. Jesus identifies Peter with Satan when Peter puts speaking his words in front of listening to the words of Jesus.

It seems Peter is often on this roller coaster ride with Jesus. In one moment, Peter is walking on the water and the next he is sinking like a stone. In one breath, Jesus calls Peter the rock on which he will build his church and in the next breath Peter becomes a stumbling block to Jesus. As Peter was sinking in the Sea of Galilee, he cried out, "Lord Save Me.", but when Jesus told his disciples how he would save them, Peter thought he could save Jesus from his suffering. Before Jesus was crucified, he told Peter that he would deny him three times before the cock crowed. Once again, Peter rebuked what Jesus said and put the concerns of his life ahead of the salvation that Jesus was about to complete.

You and I understand all too well the rapid turns that this life can take. Maybe you can point to a specific life changing event in your life or maybe like Peter you can name several times when you have experienced highs quickly followed by unexpected lows. I am no longer a huge fan of roller coasters. Rob Krogstad and I were sponsored by the Baltic Farmers Elevator around 1977 to attend COOP camp in Liberty Missouri. One of the highlights of this trip was spent at Worlds of Fun in Kansas City. I was a bit braver back then and went several times on every roller coaster. One ride was called the "Scream Roller" where the tracks went through dark long tunnels and you had no idea if you would be going up or left or right or plunging down again. Since it was completely dark there was nothing you could do to prepare for the next turn you would take. You just hung on for the ride.

I tend to see the roller coaster ride that Peter took with Jesus as a comfort to me. Peter was never left to sink in the sea or trapped in his fear without Jesus always being there to raise him up from where he had fallen. This week, we received the news that members from Willow Creek got the life changing news that their granddaughter had been killed in a car accident. It was less than a year ago that this granddaughter's dad died unexpectedly from a heart attack. These grandparents know the feeling of plunging down to a new unexpected low. Today, we are including Kelly and Robin Knudsen in our prayers today. Their lives were turned around this week after receiving news that their 24-year son was killed by a hit and run accident in Sioux Falls. You and I know several examples of how quickly life changes after hearing unwanted changes in a person's health. We like Peter have been on or know people who have experienced the rapid turns this life can take.

Just knowing that someone else has been where you have been doesn't give much comfort. Knowing that "life happens" doesn't raise anyone from the lows in this life. Thinking you might get through what you are going through on your own is like Peter offering his help to save Jesus without having a plan of how to do it.

Peter did not listen closely to what Jesus said. Instead Peter said what he wanted to hear. The same happens with the next words Jesus told his disciples. Jesus told them, "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 for my sake will find it. What will they give in return for their life?"

What did you hear Jesus say to you in these words? Did you hear that you could save yourself by denying yourself of something? Even if denying yourself means giving up something bigger than Mt. Dew or chocolate during Lent? And once you have denied yourself of something you enjoy, do you hear that the second step to salvation is finding a cross to bear? Or did you hear what Jesus said, "Those who want to save their life will lose it". Jesus is not outlining the steps you must follow to achieve your salvation. Jesus outlines the steps he has already taken to the cross for your salvation.

We don't know what events we may face this week. But there is no turn in this life that can take us from the love Jesus has for you. Jesus is not watching from the sidelines to see if you can make it through on your own. Jesus is close to you and will deliver you and raise you up again.

The stone is rolled away from the grave. Jesus has overcome the greatest stumbling block we can face, death itself. Jesus has done for you what he told Peter he MUST do. Jesus suffered, died, was buried, and now lives again. Amen.