

Pentecost 14-September 3,2023

Baltic and East Nidaros Parish

Matthew 16:21-28

"And" Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

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

If you remember your grammar, the word "and" is called a conjunction which is a word which connects two parts of a sentence. I would admit that I'm not the best at remembering everything I hear, especially if there are many things given in a list for me to do. If what I heard is easy to do, it is more likely it will happen, but if something in the list of things connected with the word "and" isn't what I want to hear, it is less likely to happen. When a member of the Trinity uses the word, "and" you can depend on that whatever is spoken before and after the "and" will take place. The "and" is not placed there for us to choose which part we like and forget the other words that Jesus says that trouble us. When Jesus says "and" you should pay attention to everything he says because it will happen whether you like it or not. I couldn't help but notice how often Jesus used the word "and" in today's reading. Some of the things Jesus says we don't mind hearing, but some things that Jesus says, we prefer to tune out from our hearing or do not want to believe. And this was certainly true for Peter.

In the gospel reading for today, Jesus draws a line between what his ministry had been about before and what it soon would become. It is as if Jesus is putting a bookmark in the pages of scripture between when Peter rightly identified Jesus as the Messiah which Pastor Jeff preached about last week and now what Jesus must go through to become our Savior AND Jesus also teaches us what we can expect will happen to you and me as true followers of Jesus.

Peter might have heard that it was on his confession that Jesus would build the church. Peter failed to hear Jesus tell him that "flesh and blood did not give Peter this confession", but his Father in heaven. The words that came out of Peter's mouth were none other than God's. It was not on Peter that the church would be built, but the keys to the kingdom of heaven would be the forgiveness of sins which is the solid foundation of the church yet today. Peter was right when he identified Jesus as the Messiah, but Peter had no idea what Jesus must go through to be his savior and your savior.

First, Jesus said that he must go to Jerusalem. So good so far. Jerusalem was the place that people went up to worship. But what Jesus had to say did not stop there. Jesus said AND undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders, chief priests and scribes. The disciples who had just heard that Jesus would be their savior were now hearing that the power that they thought he would have, and use would be stripped away. Jesus wasn't going to use his power on the elders, chief priests, and scribes, instead he was going to be led like a sheep to slaughter. This would be enough for most people to quit listening. I will admit that when I watch the "Passion of the Christ", I leave the room when Jesus undergoes the great suffering that he predicted would happen. But Jesus still is not done. Jesus then says AND be killed. Whatever ears that were still listening are likely now closed to whatever Jesus might say next. What good is a Messiah who is not just weak, but now is dead. Jesus however does say more, but I doubt if Peter or any of the disciples heard him say, AND on the third day be raised.

If you remember, Jesus did not give Peter the credit for calling him the Messiah. Jesus said that saying such a statement came from his heavenly Father. Peter didn't find that confession within himself, but it was given to him through the work of the Holy Spirit. In the same way, Jesus does not directly condemn Peter for rebuking this plan of salvation that includes suffering and death before resurrection. Jesus did not say, "Get behind me Peter". Jesus said, "Get behind me, Satan". Jesus knew that just as quickly as the Holy Spirit had left a moment for Satan to speak, Satan began to undo what Jesus had just said MUST take place. Jesus had heard this voice before. It was this voice that spoke to Jesus in the wilderness immediately after he was baptized. Satan spoke to Jesus immediately after the Holy Spirit had spoken to him and claimed him as his beloved Son. What Satan had to say

sounded good and encouraging. Satan wanted Jesus to remove his hunger by using his power to make bread from stones. Satan was willing to give Jesus whatever he wanted if he would bow down and worship him. Jesus knew that it wasn't Peter speaking, but it was Satan himself and it would be through Peter that he would become a stumbling block to the course Jesus said he would take to become the Savior of the world.

It is worth noting that Peter was called a stumbling block, not a roadblock. When there is a roadblock, you must take a different route. When the bridge west of Baltic was being rebuilt it was not a stumbling block. It was a complete roadblock. You had to find a different way. It is understandable that Peter would understand or like Jesus' suffering and dying and he would speak against Jesus having to go through such pain, but Satan was really against Jesus dying and rising again, because he knew that because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, the sting of death would be taken away for all followers of Jesus from that day on. However, neither Peter nor Satan could not say anything to change the direction that Jesus said he must go. Peter and Satan were minor and very short-term stumbling blocks. Jesus' rebuke to Peter and Satan quickly put Jesus back on the road to Jerusalem where he would suffer greatly by everyone, be killed AND after the third day be raised.

After Jesus describes that his glory would not come from his exercise of power, but through his suffering on the cross, Jesus tells what it means to become his follower. Following Jesus, contrary to what is believed by many does not come from your obedience to Jesus. Salvation is not about the good you do outnumbering the bad things you do. If this was true, salvation would be up to you, and well then good luck. Jesus instead says, deny yourselves and take up your cross and follow me. Another "and". Jesus doesn't promise his followers to take control of their salvation and in doing so will be promised days of happiness and prosperity. Jesus is promising that you too as a follower of Jesus will have crosses to bear. But whatever cross you may bear in this life is only a stumbling block to the promises that Jesus has given to you that can never be taken away.

If you have sat in the pew of a Lutheran church very long, you have likely heard the phrase "Saint and Sinner". Not "saint or sinner". Or even "Sinner and then Saint. Martin Luther may have coined the phrase that we are saint and forgiven sinner, both, at the same time, but it is from these examples from scripture that we learn from stories of Peter how at one moment Peter is confession Jesus as Lord and named a rock and in the next breath Peter is rebuking Jesus and called a stumbling block. But we also know that this is not the last story about Peter in scripture. Peter is not obedient to Jesus in this story, but Jesus does not replace Peter with a better disciple who is a better follower of Jesus. Instead, Jesus remembers who he has chosen as his disciple and will use the key to the kingdom of God which is not now obviously not the person of Peter but is the forgiveness of sins. After the third day, when Jesus raises from the dead, Jesus goes looking for Peter who not only has rebuked him on this day but will also deny him three times and Jesus will forgive him and make a great preacher out of him. You have not gone up to Jerusalem to worship today, but you have been led by the Holy Spirit to this place of worship to hear that like Peter, there is nothing you can do that can prevent the love of Jesus from coming to you. Jesus told his disciples that the Son of Man is to come with the angels in the glory of his Father and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. It is Jesus who has paid the price and has exchanged the sin that was yours with the righteousness that was his. This all is because Jesus went to Jerusalem and greatly suffered for your sake and was killed for your sins and after three days was raised so that you too may have life eternal. Amen