

Sermon – 08/30/20

Text – Matthew 16:21-28

Theme – “Cursed Peter”

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Last week we heard about “Blessed Peter”; today it will be “Cursed Peter”. So what happened between then and now? Well, you may recall that last week we heard Peter answer Jesus’ question of “*Who do you say that I am?*” His answer was the correct one; he confessed: “*You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.*” But today we hear how Peter fouled that all up by then trying to tell Jesus how to be that Christ.

It was a great moment for Peter, to be sure, when he heard Jesus’ blessing, when his Master gave him that nickname of Peter (the Rock), when he was told that he would be given the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Peter’s head probably swelled up a bit – he *did* have a tendency in that direction (as many of us do). He starts to think he has a good handle on who Jesus was, and why He had come, and what He would accomplish. But Peter was sorely mistaken, as he found out in our reading today.
(pause)

Our text follows immediately upon the verses we heard last week, and they begin this way: “... *from that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things...*” St. Matthew wants to make it very clear for us that Jesus told the Twelve exactly what was going to happen to Him. Jesus wants them to know because it is so very different from their expectations and desires.

But what Jesus said upset and angered Peter. So much so that he does the unthinkable: he takes Jesus aside and rebukes Him! Imagine that: Peter treats the One he has just called the Son of God as if

He were a slow, dull child. Peter takes Jesus aside and tells Him that he (Peter) knows more and better about how the Christ is to carry out His work than does the Christ Himself! What arrogance! What an ego! What a mistake!

For Peter's words and actions draw Jesus into a confrontation with Peter. In front of the whole group (the same ones who had heard Jesus praise and bless Peter), Jesus dresses down Peter. He sharply rebukes Peter. He tells Peter to remember just which is the Master and which is the disciple. He even calls Peter another name: "Satan".

Jesus' point was to remind Peter (and all the rest) that He knew exactly what He was doing. He was doing what His Father sent Him to do. And if Peter truly believes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, then he needs to trust Jesus has a purpose and reason for it all – even those things that Peter did not like or understand, like the suffering and dying and rising again.

Now, of course, we know what that purpose was: we know that Jesus was going to Jerusalem to suffer/die/rise because that is the only way for our sin to be dealt with properly and effectively. Unless Jesus goes to Jerusalem and suffers/dies/rises we have no hope; we are left in our sin. It is only by His taking our place on that cross, suffering the hell we have merited for our countless sins, that the price demanded by God's holy and just Law can be satisfied. It is only in His dying our death – physical AND spiritual – that we can have eternal life restored to us. It is only rising again on the third day that His victory over sin/death/devil can be seen and known.

But at this point, Peter does not get any of that. All he knows is that what Jesus is talking about does not fit with his picture of what the Christ is to do, and how He will be received. So it is that he rebukes Jesus. You see, Peter has fallen into the devil's trap of reshaping, remaking God into our image of who He is and what we think He should be. And so Peter's words were really the devil's words – even though Peter did not know it. Surely Peter thought he was giving Jesus good advice. Surely he

thought he was only looking out for Jesus. Surely he thought he was actually serving God by telling Jesus that He did not need to suffer/die/rise.

But good intentions don't matter. No, Peter was dead wrong. He was actually being Satan's mouthpiece, as Jesus rightly points out. Peter did NOT have in mind the things of God – in which He gives us the forgiveness of sins and eternal life – he had in mind the things of man, in which he was fixated only on this life and the here-and-now. (pause)

Preachers like Peter because he gives us lots of good material and illustrations. It is an easy move from Peter to us. Like Peter we have made the good confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. We have heard God's words of approval upon us – first spoken at the baptismal font, where we were called by name and brought into His family. Words that He has repeated to us so many times since – in Sunday School, confirmation class, sermons, Bible study. And sometimes, like Peter, we let those words go to our heads. We start to think that we know everything, that WE are the experts, that God should listen to us tell Him how things ought to be done.

Like Peter, we often look for our Christ to be One who rides high in this world, enjoying the respect and admiration of the masses, liked and accepted by everyone. But He is not. No, the world *always* rejects Him. The world *always* denies Him. The world *always* despises and refuses Him. And we don't like that, do we?

We look around us at a half-empty church and wonder “why?” What are we doing wrong that more people are not here each week? Should we change our message to interest them? Should we stop pointing out sin and our need for a Savior? Who likes to admit that he is a “poor, miserable sinner”? Should we try to be more “relevant” by focusing on topics of the day, on meeting people's “felt needs”, instead of that tired old Lutheran system of Law and Gospel?

But you see, that is precisely the same thing that Peter was saying to Jesus. Like all people, we have that failing of looking at things through human eyes and understanding, rather than on how God sees them. And because of that, we often misunderstand and misread what God is doing. He does not operate as we do. He does not look at the outside, at the outward, at appearances. Nor does He usually work through the high and mighty. In fact, it is often just the opposite. For instance, He takes dirt and creates Adam; a rib to make Eve. He saves only Noah and his little family (eight in all) from the Flood. He calls old and childless Abraham to be the father of nations. He chooses the Israelites — a nation of slaves — to be His people. He selects an overlooked, ignored shepherd boy to be king. He sends His Son into our flesh, but born to a humble virgin and her carpenter husband, not the Jewish king or high priest. When He is born, He is laid to rest in a manger, welcomed and worshiped only by shepherds and barnyard animals. As an infant He is forced to flee to Egypt to escape Herod. He grows up in the boondocks. He is rejected by His family, betrayed by one of His own disciples, denied by this very Peter we have been talking about, and abandoned by all the rest. He dies alone, forsaken by all, with even the sun turning its face from Him as He (though innocent) carries everyone else’s sin. His last words, as recorded for us by St. Mark, are these: *“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”*

And yet it is through that apparent defeat that He wins our forgiveness and salvation. But mere human eyes don’t – can’t – see that. No, all they see is a dead, lonely, crushed, lost Man. However, *we* know better: with eyes given spiritual sight by the Holy Spirit, we see that it was only in this way that Satan could be beaten, sin overcome, and death forever conquered. We know that what *seems* to be the most terrible and pointless day there at Calvary really is the most wonderful and necessary day – and so we paradoxically call it “Good Friday”, when God died for man, when God suffered hell in order to give us heaven.

Knowing that such is how God chooses to work and do things, why should we be shamed and embarrassed and shocked when He does this in a similar way today: in our lives and in our world? For instance, our church may look unimpressive, but look at it as God sees it. Is His Word being proclaimed and taught here? Are sinners washed clean in the waters of baptism here? Is the voice of Christ heard here, absolving and forgiving us? Are His saints fed with the Body and Blood of our Lord in His holy Supper?

Now, am I saying that everything is perfect and rosy and fine here? That we have no problems or areas we need to do better? No. We remain sinners, even after receiving all those gifts from our God. We still live in a fallen and sinful world that tempts us and leads us astray. We still have the devil prowling around like a roaring lion among us, seeking to devour whom he may. I fail as your pastor. You fail as God's children. We fail as His people in sharing His love and Gospel. But that does not change what God is doing here, does it?

For our sins and failures we need to repent. We need to seek God's forgiveness. We need to pray for greater faith, greater faithfulness, greater love, greater service to our neighbor. But do not ever forget what God has done – and continues to do – among us here, and within each of us as His people. You have been forgiven. You have been called by name. You have been brought into the very family of God. You have been joined/connected/ made one with Christ. You are God's beloved and precious children, for whom He would do (and give) anything. Never forget that. Never doubt that. Never lose sight of that. (pause)

Every Sunday we have the opportunity to hear that Gospel in lessons and sermons and hymns and liturgy. We have Bible studies and confirmation class where we can grow in faith and knowledge of that Gospel. Our day school intertwines that saving Gospel in its classes every day. In communion, you are invited to come and receive, to eat and drink, the Body and Blood of the One who died so that you

might live. At this baptismal font sinners are brought into God's family in the new birth of water and the Word.

It doesn't look like much, I know. Big deal, some might even say. Where are the miracles? Where are the life-changing stories? The crowds? Well, salvation and faith are the greatest miracles of all, aren't they? And what is more life-changing than transforming those enslaved to Satan into being the very children of God? And you want crowds? Well, then remember the words of our communion liturgy: "...with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify Your glorious name..." They ARE here – the angels and archangels and the saints above – all worshipping with us. And so are all our Christian brothers and sisters around the world, even if we see none of them. We are together because we are all united and one in Christ.

So, don't be depressed when it looks like things are not going our way. Don't be like "cursed Peter" who tried to tell God how to be God. No, remember the confession that you have made – that Jesus *is* the Christ, the Son of the Living God – and then **trust** Him. Trust that He knows exactly what He is doing. Trust that He is almighty. Trust that He loves you, that He is working all things for the good of those who love Him (and that includes you). And be at peace, in our Savior, the Christ, the Son of the Living God who has given you eternal life. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

We continue with the Prayers.....