

13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

September 3, 2023

Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church

## **The Church God Wants: A Church that Takes Up Its Crosses**

### **Matthew 16:21-26 (EHV)**

*From that time, Jesus began to show his disciples that he had to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and experts in the law, and be killed, and on the third day be raised again.*

*Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “May you receive mercy, Lord! This will never happen to you.”*

*But Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a snare to me because you are not thinking the things of God, but the things of men.”*

*Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone wants to follow me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. In fact whoever wants to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. After all, what will it benefit a person if he gains the whole world, but forfeits his soul? Or what can a person give in exchange for his soul?”*

Dear friends in Christ,

Just last week, we heard Peter’s bold confession of Christ. “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus praises this confession and tells Peter that this confession is the rock upon which the Church is built. The good news that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God is what brings people into the body of Christ, the Church. Peter is more than willing to confess that Jesus is the Christ when Jesus is doing miracles, winning theological battles with the Pharisees, and teaching about the kingdom of heaven. However, it quickly becomes evident that Peter does not know what it means for Jesus to be the Christ.

The Gospel reading for today follows immediately after Peter’s confession. Was it days or weeks or a month later? We don’t know, but it was no very long until Peter demonstrates his ignorance of what it means for Jesus to be the Christ. Jesus speaks clearly about what will happen to the Christ:

*From that time, Jesus began to show his disciples that he had to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and experts in the law, and be killed, and on the third day be raised again.*

This is a big turning point in Matthew’s Gospel. The earlier chapters tell of Jesus’ teaching and miracles. This is the kind of Jesus who many in the world love and understand. Jesus helps people. Jesus is kind. And most people like parts of the Sermon on the Mount. Don’t judge. Do unto others. But in Matthew 16, Jesus shifts the message to his purpose as the Christ. The Christ is going to suffer many things. The Christ is going to be killed. The Christ is going to rise again. I don’t think Peter processed the last part but he heard Jesus talk about suffering and death.

Jesus tells his disciples that this course of action is necessary. He does not say something like, “When we get to Jerusalem, things might get bad.” He does not say, “There are people in Jerusalem who will try to hurt me.” Instead, Jesus “began to show his disciples that he HAD to go to Jerusalem.”

Jesus' path was not optional. He "had" to go, suffer, die and rise again. He was not fuzzy about this or soften it by "this might happen" or there is a possibility of suffering when I go to Jerusalem. "it is necessary" (die).

Big turning point for the disciples and the gospel of Matthew. From teaching and miracles that drew crowds to the declaration of Peter "You are the Christ, the Son of God" to the actual mission of the Christ which is suffering and death.

Peter rebukes Jesus. No, Jesus you must be mistaken. This is not God's plan. Surely, God's plan cannot involve suffering and death and humiliation. Peter asks for mercy for Jesus! He has good intentions but does not understand the things of God. Ever taken God aside and quietly told him he is not doing the things he should be doing? Why are you allowing Christians to suffer and be killed in many places in this world? It would be better if the Christians were victorious and successful so they could lead the governments of the world into peace and love for all the people. Wouldn't it be better if we Christians did not suffer disease and illness so we could help more people who do? Wouldn't it be better if all the laws of our nation favored Christianity so the gospel would flourish? Would it be better if no Christian suffered from financial poverty so that we had more than enough to send missionaries and start churches and build beautiful churches throughout the world?

Peter's end goal was the things of God but wanted to achieve them by the things of humans. This is satanic thinking – to achieve victory by power. Jesus calls him out and us too. When Jesus returns, he will return in power and glory. Final victory for God's people will be by the power of Christ. Making us God's people was accomplished by suffering and death, by the humiliation of the cross followed by exaltation of the resurrection.

Our crosses – we don't choose, but we bear patiently and don't take God aside and rebuke him when things are not going according to our plan. This is a wonderful witness to the world. Praise the Lord Jesus when wealthy and poor, when healthy and sick, when popular and spoken against, in every situation of life.

Amen.