

SERMON FOR SUN. AUGUST 30 AND WED. SEPT. 2, 2020

Pent 13 A Matt 16:21-28 “Back to Kindergarten”

Dear fellow redeemed, when I was in college I read a book called, “Everything I need to know I learned in Kindergarten.” The author said we’d all be better off if we just remembered the lessons we learned as children: If you make a mess, clean it up. If you do something wrong, say you’re sorry. That sort of thing. It’s too bad that the book came out much too late for St. Peter to read.

You see, in today’s Gospel lesson Peter thought he had it all figured out. He’d just confessed Jesus to be the Messiah, the Son of the Living God and everything seeming to be coming together. Everywhere Jesus went, the crowds were getting larger.

The miraculous signs Jesus did kept increasing his popularity—healing the sick, cleansing lepers, making the lame walk and the blind to see, the deaf to hear and the mute to speak, casting out demons—he could even raise the dead and calm violent seas. Yes it sure seemed like heaven on earth when you were with Jesus.

And Peter was feeling pretty good about himself too. After confessing Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God, Jesus had called him blessed! No doubt Peter was excited about the future, looking forward to what would happen next. He thought he had life with Jesus figured out

But then Jesus started to talk to his band of men about going to Jerusalem to suffer at the hands of his enemies and finally to die and on the 3rd day.

This didn’t square with what Peter thought would happen so he begins to rebuke Jesus saying, **“Far be it from you Lord. This shall never happen to you!”**

Jesus’ reply must have stung him, as the words burned into his ears and cut into his heart. Our Lord said, **“Get behind me Satan. You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting you mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”**

Just like that, Peter the ace student, became Peter the goat, given a proverbial dunce cap to wear. Peter had to learn what it meant for Jesus to be the Christ, something we all learned in Kindergarten Sunday School.

What Peter didn't understand was that for Jesus to carry out his mission as Messiah and Savior, **he must go to Jerusalem and suffer at the hands of His enemies, be killed and the on the 3rd day be raised.**

He **must**. He must because there is no other way for Him to be our Savior. The cross was always his destination. His death there was no accident. God used this awful act of brutality, to save us from our sins.

As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, **"God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us so that in him we could have the righteousness of God."**

Jesus would die a horrible death, but the result would be life for all who are enabled to believe in Him.

What looked like defeat would be the ultimate victory over his enemies—and ours—sin, death and the devil. That's why Jesus *must* go to the cross, Peter. **PAUSE**

Brothers and sisters, the fact that the man on the cross died so that our sins could be forgiven is theology 101, stuff we learn about in kindergarten Sunday School.

So maybe you're sitting there in your pews this morning thinking, "Pastor, we KNOW all this already! There's no need to tell us once again, is there?"

Well then, if you know all this why do you act like Peter? Oh yes, you do! How? When Jesus says to you, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" your reaction is, ***"Far be it from me, Lord. This shall never happen to me!"***

Like Peter, you think and are sometimes thought that life as a Christian should be easy. You're a baptized child of God and he's promised to take care of your needs.

You go to church, your sins are forgiven, even the hymns are usually pretty good, so it's full steam ahead. Yes, life is good with Jesus.

But then the cross comes and messes up your plans for life on easy street. When that happens, you want to throw that cross off your shoulders so that you can do what you think is right.

And when you find that's not possible, perhaps, like Peter, you rebuke God. *"God, why are you doing this to me? This is not how it's supposed to go!"*

Oh but it is the way God wants it to go, you Peters. Jesus said, **"Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what shall it profit a man to gain the whole world and yet forfeits his soul?"**

Now you CAN deny God's claim on your life, you can shrug the cross over your shoulders—many do just that.

I'm pregnant? Not in my plans. And so a precious child never sees the light of day. Obey my parents? But what do they know! Give up my golf game or miss the beginning of a Packer game so that I can spend time with my family at church? Not going to happen.

Forgive my neighbor? Not after what they did to me! Help my neighbor? What have they ever done for me? Repent of any of the things, I just mentioned? But pastor, don't you see, everyone is doing those things.

Yes, in these and many other ways we and all too often do shirk God's claim on you and his directions for living. So, it's back to Kindergarten for all of us! **PAUSE**

Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, let him take up his cross and follow me." It's commonly thought that this means that Christians are bound to suffer.

But that's not what it means. You might suffer, perhaps you even will, but taking up your cross means much more than that.

You see, Jesus doesn't want you to suffer, he wants you dead! You're not wanted dead and alive, God wants you dead, then alive. Dead and then alive in Him.

Dead and then alive in your baptism into his death and resurrection. Dead and then alive as you produce the fruits of the faith granted you in Baptism.

He wants you to die of your Peter like, “I’ve got it all figured out attitude, to your clinging to the things of this world and instead to live in Jesus, clinging to Him, His forgiveness and His victory over sin and death.

And so to pierce your calloused hearts, the Lord allows crosses to come into your life. Not to hurt you or just to make you suffer, but to help you. To save you so that you die and rise with Jesus and thus find out what it truly means to live.

And what does a life in Christ look like? Take your bulletin home today and when you get there, reread the words of St. Paul in today’s Epistle lesson.

There are some tough asks of you in there and maybe you’ll be tempted to say, “Never Lord, not me.” But that’s your calling as a Christian: to be a living sacrifice in your home, school, workplace, church and neighborhood.

And at times, being a living sacrifice and reflecting God’s love, compassion etc will cost you. But you’ll see that the benefits in heaven and on earth far outweigh the costs.

So come and receive the strength to live out your faith by partaking the body and blood that He gave into death and was raised to life for you.

His resurrection is your resurrection too, for as St. Paul wrote, **“If we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.**

So take my fellow redeemed and remember what you learned in the Kindergarten of your faith: That the cross is the way to life. A life of joy, peace and glory in a kingdom that has no end. **AMEN**