

Pentecost 12            8/31/14  
Matthew 16:21-28      17A

v. 24 of the appointed Gospel: “IF ANYONE WOULD COME AFTER ME, LET HIM DENY HIMSELF AND TAKE UP HIS CROSS AND FOLLOW ME.”

The weather last weekend threw the proverbial wrench into the plans of the Heller family. Our challenge was not exactly like a farmer trying to harvest wheat from their fields or struggling to keep the basement dry, it was what to do for entertainment when the weather prevented outdoor activities, other than surviving in an ark. Christian and Andrew, and their girlfriends, were all home, so when we had bonded enough over card games, the boys dug around until they found some old board games, including the game “Clue.” For those of you not familiar with Clue, the object of the game is to solve a murder – a make-believe murder, remember -- it’s only a game – by correctly guessing the murderer, the weapon used, and the location of said crime. You know, Prof. Plum with the candlestick in the library. I don’t even have to say it, do I? Whether it was because of rust, old age, or a general lack of human reason, I was pretty much clueless playing Clue.

You don’t have to play the game Clue to be clueless. Look at the disciples in our Gospel for today. The disciples sat at the feet of Jesus and received their theological education directly from the mouth of the Savior. Yet, the Gospel seemed to remain foolishness to them. They were often clueless when it came to understanding the Christian faith and life.

Just last week, we heard Peter’s confession of faith, on behalf of all the twelve, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus commended Peter because he confessed the truth that Jesus is true God

and true man. Then begins our lesson for today, “From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” What was Peter’s reaction? “Peter took Him aside and began to **correct** Him, saying, ‘Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you’.” Yes, I know, your lesson reads, “rebuke,” but really, the word means “correct.” Peter corrected Jesus, because when Jesus talked of His passion and cross, Peter thought the Son of God had made a mistake!

Peter was echoing the temptation of the devil. Satan wanted nothing more than to keep Jesus from the cross. He knew that, by His death on the cross, the Seed of Woman would crush His lying head. In the temptation in the wilderness, that is exactly what the Accuser was doing. Satan offered Jesus the entire world – as though it were his to give, by the way – to keep Him from the cross. But, Jesus rebuked him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve (Mt 4:10).’” Nothing could keep Jesus from going to the death of the cross to save us, not Satan’s lies, not Peter being clueless.

Peter did not realize it, but he was tempting his Lord with the same temptation. “Avoid the cross. Take the easy way. This talk of death makes no sense. You can have it all without the cross.” Jesus rebuked Peter in much the same way he rebuked the devil, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

Today’s Gospel brings us to a major milestone in Christ’s mission to save us from our sins. Last Sunday, Peter’s confession taught us **who** Jesus is – the Son of God in human body. Up until this point, Jesus had

been showing that He was the Son of God by His teaching and His miracles. Yes, He did miracles to show His compassion, but much more importantly, they were signs that proved He was the Son of God.

Now that Jesus had shown that He was the Promised Messiah, this Sunday, we learn **what** the Son of came to this earth and took on human flesh to do – “go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised”.

Baptized into Jesus and living in Him, all that Jesus’ has is ours – His righteousness is our righteousness, His death is our death, His resurrection from the grave is our resurrection from the grave, His heaven is our heaven, His righteousness is our righteousness, and – AND – His cross is our cross. So He says, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

Have you ever considered this: When did Jesus carry His cross? Only after He had been tried and convicted and sentenced to death. Such is your lot, O Child and Heir of God. Taking up your cross and following Jesus means that you have been tried, convicted, and sentenced to death. You are a dying person. Living in Christ means that we daily die to sin that we may rise to new life in Christ. The Christian life is the life of repentance and this is repentance.

In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus said, “For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it (9:24).” This is the Great Reversal of the Christian life. We are strangers here, our home is in heaven. We are in the world, but we Christians are called not to be part of the world. We are to fear, love, and trust in God alone. But, oh, how we fear men – what they think of us; how we love the things of this world,

especially what God calls sin; and oh how we trust in the things that “moth and rust destroy and ... thieves break in and steal.”

Remember when Jesus talked of His cross and death, Peter “corrected” Him because He thought Jesus had made a mistake? You do it, too. You correct God. Oh, yes you do! When God in His mercy, knowing what is best for you, allows, permits, a cross to come into your life, you correct Him, as though He made a mistake. “Why me, Lord? What have I done to deserve this?,” you say.

Our own sinful nature works to convince us that the cross just doesn't make sense. Our sinful nature wants us to forget about what God has promised in His Word and rely on our own feelings and reason instead. Our flesh always insists that God conform His will to our wants, our desires, our felt needs. Our sinful nature wants to judge itself according to its own rules and not according to God's Commandments. Instead of relying on God's promises, our sinful nature wants to judge God.

The greatest cross for the Christian is the temptation to refuse Jesus on His terms and insist that He do things our way. Each and every one of us is tempted to follow in Peter's footsteps and tell Jesus what to do. This is nothing other than the self-centered attitude of the old sinful nature. And this is the cross that you bear, O Christian.

The Holy Spirit inspired the prophet Isaiah to write, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts (Is 55:8-9).” God's ways often make little or no sense to us because we do not have His infinite knowledge and perfect wisdom. We walk by faith, not by sight. So that we can walk by faith, bearing the cross even in the midst of things we cannot

understand, God gives us faith through the Means of Grace, faith to trust that God works good in all things, even crosses. Our Lutheran Confessions say it this way,

“God in His purpose has ordained before the time of the world by what crosses and sufferings He would conform every one of His elect to the image of His Son. His cross shall and must work together for good for everyone, because they are called according to God’s purpose (SD 11).”

Remember: bearing a cross means you are a dying person, dying to sin and selfishness and trust in self, to trust in Christ alone.

This weekend is Labor Day weekend in our nation. We have an extra day to rest before fall speeds along, with winter soon to follow. The Good News of the Christian faith is that we will rest from all our crosses in heaven. We take heart from God’s Promise in the book of Hebrews, ““There remains a Sabbath-rest for the people of God.