

Pentecost 14 8/30/26
 Matthew 16:21-28 17A

“IF ANYONE WOULD COME AFTER ME, LET HIM DENY HIMSELF AND TAKE UP HIS CROSS AND FOLLOW ME.”

In August of 2003, the Church of the Holy Cross in Midtown Manhattan, New York City, was broken into twice. In the first break-in, thieves stole a moneybox that was situated near a candle rack. Three weeks later, the church was burglarized a second time. But this time, the thieves escaped with something much more valuable. They stole a 4-foot tall, 200-pound plaster statue of Jesus from the crucifix, but they left His cross behind. When interviewed by the media, the church caretaker, David St. James, expressed his bewilderment at this. "They just decided, '**We're going to leave the cross and take Jesus.**' We don't know why they took just him. We figure if you want the crucifix, you take the whole crucifix." In other words, Dear Saints of God, "**If you want Jesus, you must take his cross, too.**"

This is what Jesus our Lord teaches us this Sunday, *“If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me”* (v. 24).

But we are too much like Peter, aren't we? 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”* (Mt 16:16). 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 (v. 21).

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” (v. 22). Yes, I know, your lesson in English 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 trying to protect Jesus – as though the Son of God needed protecting – from the cross. He was, in essence saying to Jesus, “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*” (v. 23). And the “things of man” is glory, ease, not being inconvenienced in any way, shape, or form.

Peter’s heart and mind were set on **glory**. We want Jesus, especially the “parachute” Jesus – you know: open in the hour of death so I don’t go to hell – but, today, I will follow Jesus on my terms. Difficulty. Inconvenience. Pain. Sorrow. Anguish. Don’t want any of it! We want Jesus, but we don’t want the cross.

St. Paul is really teaching us the same thing Jesus is teaching us with His words in our Epistle, *Let love be genuine* (Ro 12:9). We could think of it this way: We love John 3:16, the Gospel in the nutshell, right? But, John 3:16 is not the only verse in the Bible. Consider all the Scriptures.

Do not let the sun go down on your anger, Paul also writes (Ep 4:26). But, you do. You keep a record of wrongs and refuse to be reconciled, and you remain angry at your neighbor.

Ponder these words of Jesus, “*If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone*” (Mt 18:15). But, you

don't. You gossip and destroy your neighbor's reputation, all so you can feel better about yourself.

Reflect for a moment on these words of St. Paul, *I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content (Ph 4:11)*. But, you are not content. You have a house, home, a spouse, and a lot of stuff. But, it's not enough, and it's not good enough for you. You want what your neighbor has.

Jesus, who spoke the words of John 3:16, also said this, *"I am with you always" (Mt 28:20)*. But, when the darkness of this present age overwhelms us, the lies of the old, evil foe and your feelings tell you that you are alone, that most certainly God has abandoned you. And, in the weakness of your faith, you believe it.

Let love be genuine. Yah, ok. I will let my love **for myself** be genuine; love for what I want, when I want it. Love for God, love for my neighbor, nah, not so much. That love involves a cross.

Oh yes, the GOOD NEWS for us is that the love Jesus had for us showed itself when He went to the cross. The Savior did take up His cross and go to Jerusalem and suffered many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and He was killed, and on the third day He was raised to life again. He died on Calvary's cross carrying all of your ego, your self-centeredness, your selfishness, your disdain for your neighbor, and all your sin. His blood was shed all over that wood so that you would be forgiven. And, He rose the 3rd day to bring that forgiveness, life, and salvation into your life.

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, 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 died to sin and all unholy lusts and desires in the waters of your baptism. Living in Christ means that we daily die to sin that we may rise to new life in Christ. Make no mistake about, Dear Child of God, Jesus is calling you to repentance this morning.

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.

Satan, the father of all lies, wants us to forget about what God has promised in His Word and rely on our own feelings and reason instead. We insist 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, not according to God’s Commandments.

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 (Is 55:8). 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.