**Matthew 16:21-28 August 30, 2020**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from the Gospel of Matthew the 16th chapter here re-reading these words, “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.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Last week we talked about the symbol of Peter, the keys in front of the upside down cross, and frankly, we completely blew past that second part and only focused on the personal nature of the office of the keys and the forgiveness of sins. But look again. Look at all these symbols on our own altar, here at Trinity Lutheran Church in Onekama. Peter’s depicts the upside down cross that he is believed to have been killed on. Andrew, his brother’s symbol, is right next to Peter’s, an X which is the description of the cross that he is said to have been killed on. You go to the next symbol and it’s a sword, in front of a shell, this symbol for James, the shell for his missionary journeys, the sword for how he died. John’s symbol is a snake in a cup, meaning that he was almost poisoned and was spared of this threat on his life. As you look throughout the rest of the symbols you’ll find James the Less’s symbol, a carpenter’s saw, said to have been how he died, Thomas’s symbol is a spear in front of a carpenter’s square, you can imagine why the spear is there, Mattias’s symbol is on the end a sword in front of a book, but in many other depictions of these symbols it’s an axe, and Bartholomew’s symbol, the knives, is so unsettling I’d really, rather not even bring it up.

It seems a little out of place, to be focusing on all this suffering and dying here while still in the summer months. After all Holy Week was a long time ago. Good Friday has come and gone. This year was different in how Easter was celebrated but hopefully you still got to sing your favorites just from the comfort of your own home. We are now in the second half of the Church Year which emphasizes the Church and its mission. So why even bring up these symbols? Or for that matter, what is Jesus talking about in our Gospel lesson? He must go to Jerusalem? He must suffer many things? He must die? We know his death happened on the cross. He even references a cross himself! Jesus doesn’t just speak of His suffering and death, but He tells His disciples that to follow him they must take up their own cross. He is alluding to the cross that He must bear when he suffers, and dies for them and the entire world.

Which brings up a good question. You may be thinking to yourself, why do we have these symbols on our altar, if they emphasize how people died? Well, why is the cross emphasized so much in our lives as Christians? Here at Trinity I invite you to look around for just a moment, and count all the crosses. The cross, I’ve learned, is really the defining contribution that we give to our community, outside of donuts of course. We have a large lit cross on our tower, and we have made a priority in replacing it. We emphasize the cross on our tower which shines out into our community and over the lake. The cross shows up on altar linens, it’s seen on holy religious items like the communion ware, the everlasting candle, and even if you were to look closely you would see on a Communion Sunday that there is a cross on each individual communion wafer. The cross appears on the front and back of the bulletin. We just took the cross that was hanging in the back of our sanctuary and refit it so that when you walk in you see the cross hanging right here above the altar, we even put lights on it to make it stand out even more! It’s even on the cards in your pew. The cross is everywhere as you look around the sanctuary. Jesus, here in Matthew 16, is telling His disciples, that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer and be killed, and we know that He goes and dies, on a cross. The cross is more than a Christian symbol that has no emphasis or meaning. The cross is not just an ornamental device to speak about Jesus. The reason we emphasize the cross here in God’s house and in our lives as Christians, is because the cross is our salvation. The cross is our hope for eternity.

Jesus said the cross was *necessary*. He *must* go to suffer these things and be raised again. That was the message He was sharing. That was the emphasis of His ministry. Now, from that time on as Matthew writes, Jesus was setting his path toward Jerusalem. Matthew provides this passion prediction, the first of His gospel, to show us the shift in focus, and to prepare us again for the events that are to come in Holy Week and Easter. While it seems foreign to us to meditate on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday this far out of the Easter season, Jerusalem is now the destination, where he will suffer, be killed, and be raised from the dead.

Yet Peter doesn’t seem to think Jesus dying was necessary. Last week we saw Peter’s solid declaration of Jesus’ identity as the Christ and the Son of God as the rock that the Church was to be built upon. Here we see Peter functioning as a different kind of rock. Not a strong stone that is the foundation for a sturdy building, but instead a boulder sitting in the way of a road. Peter is not the solid and faithful disciple of Jesus, he is instead used as a servant of Satan. Jesus turns and says to Peter, “Get behind me Satan! You are a hindrance to me.” These strong words show that Peter, by rebuking Jesus for going to Jerusalem to die, was a stumbling block to Jesus and His ministry.

Peter shied away from the implications of the cross, because it meant that the Son of God had to die, and He was going to be there to see it. He wasn’t going to be able to stop it. He was going to be responsible for it happening. The uncomfortable nature of Christ’s suffering, epitomized by the cross that He was nailed to, is emphasized in our Church, and in Christianity throughout the world. But do we want it to be? Or would we rather take the side of Peter, and instead rebuke Christ to stay away from the cross and its suffering? How many times have we even talked about these symbols? Or have you heard what they mean and why they are there? How many times have you heard what the symbols represent? Wouldn’t we rather focus on the happier symbols? Matthew’s which is just 3 money bags…perhaps Jude’s which is a ship, or Simon’s which is a fish on top of a book. Those are happy symbols and much easier to talk about. Wouldn’t we rather focus on the glorified Jesus Christ? The happy Jesus holding the children, teaching the crowds, even the Jesus who is holding a young lamb in His arms in the middle of a field? Peter was so adamant in opposition to Christ going to Jerusalem, and going to His own suffering and death that He rebukes the one that He knows is the Christ and the Son of God. Peter takes Jesus aside and says “Far be it from you Lord! This shall *never* happen to you!” In this moment Peter is acting on behalf of Satan. He is tempting Jesus with the thought that perhaps His suffering is not necessary and that He won’t have to endure the pain and the punishment of sin.

But sin demands pain and punishment. Sin in reality demands, blood. A payment of blood. A sacrificial atonement, meaning that something has to be sacrificed and die in order for sin to be paid for. We may love the sight of Jesus holding the lamb, but the truth is Jesus *is* the lamb. The lamb of slaughter. The lamb that was brought to the altar, and killed for the sins of the people. No matter how uncomfortable the cross may make us, the truth stares us dead in the face when we see it. Jesus died on that cross, because of you. Your sin put him there. If it had not been for the sin of mankind, the sin that was brought into this world through the sin of one man, and that spread to all men like a disease, Jesus would have never needed to die on the cross. But sin festered and grew with every single person that was born. And as man fell deeper and deeper into sin, the price of sin remained the same. Blood. For the wages of sin is death, and death was required in order to pay for sin. The cross is a reminder of that. Especially in the depictions of crucifixes with Jesus Christ hanging on the cross do we see the agony and torment that Jesus suffered. And as Jesus said. It was necessary for him to suffer and be killed. He had to go to Jerusalem and suffer those things, because that was what His ministry was all about.

The cross was the climax of Christ’s ministry. Because on the cross the payment was made. On the cross, the perfect lamb of God, was sacrificed for the sins of the entire world. The blood was necessary, and the blood was on our hands, for we are sinful and unclean. But our debt has been paid. And not by ourselves or anything we have done. But by Jesus Christ. On the cross. While Peter may shudder at the thought that Christ would suffer and die, Jesus had to die in order to save Peter from his sin. While we too may see the cross and remember our sin, it should not end with our sadness and guilt and shame, but it should instead be our symbol of hope.

For the cross was necessary to save us, but the empty tomb is the evidence that the work of redemption was finished by Jesus’ death. For Jesus had to go, and suffer, and be killed, and be *raised*. To show that the victory over death was complete. To show that sin and its power was destroyed forever in Christ’s victory on the cross. This cross is a symbol of the punishment, but it also is the moment that we were saved. That we were washed in the blood of the lamb. That we were promised everlasting life because the penalty of sin was removed. We are now God’s children and we are now saved from death, because Jesus Christ, died for us. That is the joy of the cross. That is the joy that is found in this symbol of suffering. And that is why in our lives we live, as Children of God in the shadow of the cross.

We live under the theology of those who live as children of the cross and not the glory that this world promises. For Jesus goes on to tell His disciples “if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” We are imitators of Jesus Christ, for we bear the cross in our lives. We live in a world, where suffering and sadness are to be expected, and glory and riches are soon gone. The reality of that suffering comes from the nature of this world which is infected with the disease of sin. Isaiah gives a perfect example of the sin that remains with us in our Old Testament lesson. “Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed?” The answer, is sin. And our hope is found not in our glory, but in God’s mercy. We, as children of God grounded on His cross of salvation, live our lives in thanksgiving in spite of the tragedies and sadness that will come our way. In spite of fear in the midst of a pandemic. In spite of the persecution that may befall us. Think about these men, whose symbols we’ve touched on. They knew Christ, and suffered all rather than to fall away from him. It’s why these symbols are here, that we may remember them and be given an example of the standard of our own faiths as we face the world around us. For we know, that through Jesus Christ, the victory is ours.

And the kingdom is ours, thanks to Christ on the cross. May that reality keep you grounded on the foundation of Jesus Christ in your life no matter what comes your way. No matter who may go before you to glory, no matter what sickness may come, rather personally or in this sense, globally. No matter if the world itself seems to want to swallow you whole and your enemies are surrounding you on every side. The kingdom is yours. The penalty has been paid. And you are washed and redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, the perfect lamb of God. May God be with you, as you live your life in the shadow of the cross because the cross is your salvation. And the cross is your hope for eternity.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.