

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost/September 3, 2017
Matt 16:21-28/Christ is With Us
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church
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“...but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

Last week’s Gospel ended with a very puzzling verse. You may remember that last week we had that marvelous confession from Peter: [Matt 16:16] “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Also Jesus declared Peter did not dream this confession up on his own, but he had received it from the Father: [Matt 16:17] “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.” This is all pretty good stuff.

Then, right there at the end of the reading, we read, [Matt 16:20] “Then [Jesus] strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.” What! I thought confessing Jesus is the Christ is a good thing. Why would Jesus tell the disciples to remain quiet? Doesn’t Jesus want us to confess Him as Lord and Christ? What’s the deal?

This is not the only time Jesus did this. There are few times Jesus seeming downplayed His role as Messiah after performing some kind of miracle or revealing something special about Himself. Jesus gave very specific and very strongly worded instructions NOT to tell anyone about what they witnessed. What gives? Today’s Gospel provides an excellent example of why Jesus did this.

You may recall last week I said we do not really have a complete picture of what it means to be the Christ until we stand at the cross and the empty tomb. You may recall Jesus Himself opened the eyes of the disciples to see Christ in all the scriptures after He rose from the dead. Today’s Gospel shows us very plainly that Peter did not

fully understand the confession God the Father gave him. He did not understand what it meant to be the Christ.

Take an extra moment to think about this. In last week's Gospel, Jesus told Peter received his confession from the Father. The words were absolutely accurate: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." In spite of that, Peter did not really know what he was saying.

Today's Gospel picks right up from last week. "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 Christ stuff. Here is the essence of what it means to be the Christ. This essence of the Christ is the deepest expression of Himself God gives to us. This is the heart and soul of Jesus' ministry here on this earth; namely suffering, death and resurrection.

Peter immediately began to show he did not understand. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you."

Now we don't use the word rebuke very often, but it means Peter was actually scolding Jesus. If we were to convert this into more modern speech, it might go like this: "Whoa! Whoa! Whoa, Jesus. Stop right there. What's all this talk about dying? We can't have any of that. Pull Yourself together. Nobody is going to kill You, at least not while I have anything to say about it.!" Peter was trying to be a good campaign manager. The only problem is, he didn't share his master's vision.

Jesus cut him off immediately. Jesus heard words like this before, when the devil tempted Him in the wilderness: [Matt 4:8-10] "...the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the

kingdoms of the world and their glory. And said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.””

Satan wanted Jesus to take the short cut, avoid the cross, become popular the easy way, etc. Satan was ready to offer Jesus the entire world if Jesus would worship him just once. Back then Jesus answered, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’”

Peter did not know it, but he was tempting his Lord the same way. “Avoid the cross. Take the easy way. There are other ways to become the king of all than going to your death. This talk of death makes no sense.” It was bad enough to hear this from the eternal enemy, but to hear it from a friend? That had to be tough. 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.”

There are so many people, even people who say they love Jesus, who just don't get it. Such people think Jesus' death on the cross seems to be a great defeat. There are many who will not place a crucifix in their church because a body on a cross is too gruesome. There are even some who will not have a cross or any other symbol of Christ's work. They do not understand the shame of the cross became the glory of God through our Lord Jesus, the Christ.

How do we forget what it means to be the Christ? I know it is a few months away, but what about Christmas? Do all the decorations and the image of a cuddly little baby in a manger crowd out the real message of Christmas? That God's Son left His throne on high and became a baby in a manger so He could grow up and die on a cross?

What about the miracles? Do we look to Jesus to make our lives comfortable here on earth or do miracles remind us Jesus is the one who has the power to take away our sin? How often do we forget what it means to be the Christ?

Jesus gave His instructions to remain silent about Him because He knew the disciples did not know what it meant to be the Christ. He knew until the disciples witnessed the suffering, the death, and the resurrection, they would not understand. He knew, until they witnessed these things, their teaching would be wrong.

After Jesus arose He appeared to the disciples. As I told you last week, it was then [Luke 24:45-46] “Jesus] opened [his disciples’] minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead.”” It was then they understood what Jesus told them, [Act 1:8] “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”” It was after they understood the Christ is about suffering, death, and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins that Jesus sent them as witnesses; Jesus sent them to tell the world Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

This is the golden thread running through the tapestry of God’s Word. This is the key to the right understanding of Holy Scripture. The Old Testament points forward to the Christ. The New Testament tells of the Christ. The life, suffering, death, and resurrection of the Christ are what make the Bible a love letter from God offering forgiveness, life, and salvation to the whole world.

The devil tried to use Peter’s ignorance about what it means to be the Christ. He worked through Peter to tempt Jesus. Jesus resisted the temptation and kept His appointment with the cross. Jesus suffering

and death earned the forgiveness of sins for all people. His resurrection from the dead opened heaven to us all.

After Jesus rose from the dead, He gave Peter and all the disciples a clear understanding of what it means to be the Christ. On Pentecost, Peter preached the confession he received from God the Father Almighty. He understood it so well, he eventually lost his life on earth for that confession.

Peter and his fellow apostles suffered much for this confession and they wrote this confession down so the church could pass it down through the generations. Now that confession is ours. Because Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, all of us who trust in Him will receive the eternal gift of heaven from Him. He will always be with you and you will always be with Him, now and into eternity.