

**Weekend of Sunday, August 30, 2020**  
**13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 22/Proper 17/Year A**  
**First Reading: Jeremiah 15:15-21**  
**Second Reading: Romans 12:9-21**  
**Gospel Reading: Matthew 16:21-28**  
**Sermon Title: “Life Lost and Found”**

**Theme**

*After Peter confesses that Jesus is “the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (16:16), Jesus reveals the ultimate purpose of his ministry. These words prove hard to accept, even for a disciple whom Jesus has called a “rock.”*

**Text**

<sup>21</sup>From that time on, [after Peter confessed that Jesus was the Messiah,] Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. <sup>22</sup>And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.” <sup>23</sup>But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

<sup>24</sup>Then Jesus told his disciples, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup>For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. <sup>26</sup>For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?

<sup>27</sup>“For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. <sup>28</sup>Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

## Sermon

You may recall that last week I concluded the sermon by giving a little praise to Peter. Remember how I said I've often wondered if he ever talked to the other gospelers about excluding some of his gaffs? But then went on to say that at least in last week's Gospel Reading, when Jesus asked who the Disciples say he is, Peter was the one to hit the bullseye when he said, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Well, today's Gospel Reading picks up from last week's Gospel Reading directly. So when Matthew wrote, "<sup>21</sup>From that time on," he meant right after that conversation with the Disciples and specifically, with Peter.

Well, Peter's moment of brilliance was not long-lasting. Having correctly identified Jesus as "the Messiah, the Son of the Living God," Jesus began explaining the mission of "the Messiah, the Son of the Living God." Matthew recorded that Jesus said

<sup>21b</sup>"that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."

Who knows whether Peter was still full of himself for answering correctly for once, or whether he truly loved Jesus so much that he just couldn't bear what Jesus was saying, but he stepped in it again, didn't he? He rebuked Jesus, and for that Jesus rebuked him, with very harsh words that we never want to be said to us.

And while it ought to hurt the heart of every Christian to know that Jesus had to undergo great suffering and be killed on our account, it is his role as "the Messiah, the Son of the Living God." Jesus didn't choose it for himself, God his Heavenly Father did. It was his pre-ordained mission and purpose.

Ironic then, don't you think, that the mother of the sons of Zebedee, James and John, would later (20:21) ask Jesus to put her sons on the throne with him when he came into his kingdom, one on the left and one on the right. Jesus tried to tell them that they didn't know what they were asking.

In the Lutheran tradition, we pastors are responsible for the teaching that goes on in our churches. I teach our 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders confirmation which is Luther's Small

Catechism, and the basics of the Bible. Then on the day of Confirmation, those children have to speak up for themselves when asked if they are willing to sign on the line to this thing we call the life of discipleship. I do the same thing with potential new members in the Inquirer's Class.

To be honest with you, I don't think anyone is listening because the life of a disciple when done right is not for sissies!

As an example of this, let us look at the first reading from the book of Jeremiah. In the first half, we have Jeremiah's whiny lament. Jeremiah complained to the LORD God by saying:

<sup>15b</sup>*on your account I suffer insult.*

<sup>17b</sup>*under the weight of your hand I sat alone,  
for you had filled me with indignation.*

<sup>18</sup>*Why is my pain unceasing,  
my wound incurable,  
refusing to be healed?*

*Truly, you are to me like a deceitful brook,  
like waters that fail.*

But then, in the second half of the reading, the LORD God responded and it ain't pretty. God's tone reminds Jeremiah that God remains on the throne and Jeremiah is but a lowly mortal. Being called to serve the Living God is the highest honor a mere mortal can receive, so stop the whining. God responded by saying,

*If you turn back, I will take you back,  
and you shall stand before me.*

*If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless,  
you shall serve as my mouth.*

*It is they who will turn to you,  
not you who will turn to them.*

<sup>20</sup>*And I will make you to this people  
a fortified wall of bronze;*

*they will fight against you,  
but they shall not prevail over you,*

for I am with you  
to save you and deliver you,  
says the LORD.

<sup>21</sup>I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked,  
and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless.

Allow me to paraphrase God, a dangerous thing to do I realize, but it is as if God said, "Jeremiah, too much has not been asked of you, and your prize for your faithfulness will be worth it. Now quit your whining. I got this!"

I'm pretty sure I told you this story before, but when I was an intern in Washington DC a guy who had recently completed his appointment in the military was going to work for a military consulting firm at the Pentagon and he called Faith Lutheran Church, the church I interned at, and asked me what important members we had in membership. When I asked him why he wanted to know that, he said that he wanted to build his resume and he thought that church membership at a church whose members included important political and military people would help.

Listen to me carefully, a life of discipleship is not a resume-building experience. Jeremiah argued that God had asked too much of him and got schooled on it, and so did Peter when the Lord Jesus said,

"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup>For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. <sup>26</sup>For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life?"

A life of discipleship is not for sissies! Are any of you listening?

And while I may have you on your heels at the present moment, let me remind you that when Jesus said <sup>John 14:6</sup>"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." That excluded all other options – real life is found through discipleship in Jesus Christ and the only other alternative is death. Or as I entitled this sermon, "Life Lost and Found." We will find life now, and in eternity through Jesus, or we will lose it all.

Well, then Pastor what does a life of discipleship look like? I am so glad you asked.

Paul gave us a really nice primer in our Second Reading. It is just one admonition after another. Now I am going to take the time to read the whole thing to you again because I don't see a way to effectively draw your attention to it without hearing it again. After all, it is all good.

<sup>9</sup>Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; <sup>10</sup>love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. <sup>11</sup>Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. <sup>12</sup>Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. <sup>13</sup>Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

<sup>14</sup>Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. <sup>15</sup>Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. <sup>16</sup>Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. <sup>17</sup>Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. <sup>18</sup>If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. <sup>19</sup>Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." <sup>20</sup>No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." <sup>21</sup>Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

And let me be clear, this passage is not the complete and exhaustive list of how and what a disciple is to do. Along with all this, we have the guidance of the Holy Spirit that will inform the disciple on every single moment of the disciple's life.

"Well Pastor, that really sounds difficult, and not self-serving, I won't always get my way, or get to do what I want to do!" you say. So you are listening, I say.

That is exactly right. "Life Lost" in this life is one that seeks only to satisfy one's self. That person may arguably have more "fun" in this life, but has missed out on all the selfless activity that makes the life of a disciple rich and meaningful, and that person should not expect a reward in the life to come.

Do you remember the parable of "the Rich Man and Lazarus?" Lazarus was a poor sick beggar who survived only on what he could beg off of others, and the rich man was merciless and thought only of himself. They both end up dying and Lazarus was carried away by angels to the *bosom of Abraham*, an Old Testament expression

for the place of comfort, what we call heaven. Lazarus, on the other hand, was in Hades the place of eternal torment, and he cried up to Father Abraham for mercy, and Abraham said,

Luke 16:25 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. <sup>26</sup>Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.'

### **Raisin' the Bar Challenge**

Now I think threatening people with Hell's torment as the motivation for becoming a Christian is a poor evangelism strategy, because if they don't believe in God or in living a life worthy of our calling as Christians, then they probably don't believe that Hell exists either.

But the reward of heaven is just one of the many benefits of a life of discipleship. Another is becoming an obedient and faithful disciple of Jesus Christ and living as best we are able according to his example, including the several admonitions that Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans. And when we do that, our whole life is worship, and that pleases God, and that should be our primary motivation. That is "Life Found" both now and for eternity.

### **Prayer**

Loving and merciful God, without the suffering and death of Jesus Christ our Lord, we would not have the abundant life you desire for us now, or the hope of eternal life in the future. But through faith in him and by his example you have opened the door to eternal life closed by human sin. We give you thanks and praise for life found only through him. We pray this in his name, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen