

Setting the Mind

Proper 17

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Matt. 16:21-28

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

The young man hesitated briefly. He was sweating. He was shaking what he hoped was minimal enough that no one else would notice. He reminded himself that he had made up his mind. He took a deep breath and climbed in.

As the floating cart entered the dark cave, he began to have second thoughts. But the water level remained the same. There was singing all around, putting him more at ease. The ride entered a lighted area with animatronic animals playing various instruments to the rhythm of the song about the young man. The cart floated on, back into the darkness.

Then it came, a dip. The young man got scared again. He didn't know how long of a drop this would be. He knew that there was at least one large one coming; but he didn't know how long the ones in this darkened cave would be. But shortly after dipping, the water leveled out again.

So it went for around three to five minutes. Darkness to light, singing animals, a little bit more ease, the darkness with another small dip, and then back to the light again. Maybe this wouldn't be so bad, the young man thought to himself.

Then he got to a lighted portion where he could see the ride would be going up, up into a cave the end of which he couldn't see. He braced himself, and for a moment, the ride paused, elongating the time of dread. The cart tilted up and he grabbed the narrow hand rail, the only safety measure on the ride.

He and the others in the cart went up and up and up, the light growing dimmer as the cart entered the angled cave. A few moments later, the cart leveled out and the young man could see light again—but different light. This light was whiter and eerie, as it was night, and it was the light coming up to the cart at the top of the drop from the rest of the park which lay below. In that moment, the young man couldn't help but wonder: What was I thinking?!

That moment atop the Splash Mountain ride in Disneyworld Florida, the young man had no choice but to trust that things would work out. In our Gospel text, Peter will find himself in a similar position after he tries to prevent Jesus from going to the cross, but gets shut down. Let's take a look.

Verse 1

Peter and the other disciples had been following Jesus for some time before Peter made the good confession that we heard 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. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, ‘Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.’”

Now we're not given Peter's intentions—his reasons why he wanted to stop Jesus. Was it because he didn't want to see Jesus die? Was it because he thought Jesus was depressed and was trying to make Him feel better? Was it fear for his friend and Lord? Was it fear for his own life, knowing that he would be following Jesus? Again, we're not given the reasons Peter had in mind. In some ways, Peter sounds like an advisor to a presidential candidate: “Sir, you shouldn't say that.”

Peter just didn't understand God's ways. However he was thinking, he was not thinking that Jesus was speaking what God wanted to have happen.

Do you ever question God's ways? God's ways, after all, are not our ways. Do you ever think that you know better than God? Is that not the temptation from Satan that led to the fall into sin to begin with? "Did God actually say...?'...You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil (Gen. 3:1b; 4b-5)."

Here Peter does not necessarily think that he is going against God's will, and yet that is what he is doing. Are there things going on in your life where what you want and what God wants may be two separate things? Are there things from God's Word that you have heard that are different from how you think they should be? Do you really understand God's ways?

As Jesus will help Peter to see, the problem for him, and possibly you, is not that you don't know God's ways, but only if you refuse to follow them.

Verse 2

"But (Jesus) turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.'"

Now we can remember last week's text: Simon made the good confession and received the name "Peter." He was going right along with God's plan and had spoken well by the Spirit. But now Jesus calls him "Satan." What a change! But *what*, specifically, had changed? It was not God's ways, but how Peter was following them.

Last week, Peter followed the way his mind had been set by the Spirit. He confessed Jesus as the "Christ, the Son of the living God." In our text this week, he tries to make Jesus do things *his* way instead of God's. As Jesus said, "(he was) not setting (his) mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

The problem for any of us comes when we put any idea or thing before God. That's what God has told us in His first commandment: "You shall have no other gods." This means that "We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things." In other words, we do not worship false gods, and we do not put anything from possessions to knowledge to anything else before God. That includes knowledge you have of how you think things should be done. When you do this, you set your mind not on the things of God, but on the things of man.

God knows that we are incapable of doing otherwise of ourselves. He knows that you and I are sinners. Our thoughts are constantly turned against Him. That's why Jesus came and why He had set His mind on going to the cross. He had set His jaw to going to the die because Jesus knew that this is what His Father in heaven wanted. So He did it. He rode the ride to its climax, and from His lofted position on the cross, He could see the world for which He was dying: those sinners who had put Him there.

Yet even on the cross, Jesus did not give in to the temptation to go against God's will and free Himself or to curse those who had hung Him there. Instead He speaks a word of forgiveness: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do (Luke 23:34b)."

Jesus allowed Himself to be crucified to death, knowing that everything would work out. And as we'll see, we can trust that things will work out for us, too.

Verse 3

"Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will

find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then will repay each person according to what he has done.”

Jesus, the One who would go on to take His cross to Calvary where He would suffer and die, forgiving us as He did, commands those who believe in Him to take up their own crosses and to follow Him. There are some good explanations as to what Jesus meant by your cross. One answer is your neighbors, in whom you see your failure to serve them every time you fail to love them as you ought. But another way your cross might be interpreted is as how you follow after Jesus.

Here it would seem that He is saying the latter—to follow after Him, but more than that, to follow after Him even when we would think of doing things a different way. Again, of ourselves, we could not hope to do these things. According to the Augsburg Confession, “Without faith, human nature does not call upon God, nor expect anything from Him, nor bear the cross (AC XX 36-37).”

But you do not, dear friends in Christ, believe in God or Jesus of yourselves. You’ve received God the Holy Spirit so that you might believe in Him, in Jesus as your Savior, and to follow after Him bearing your own cross. In every situation in life, the Spirit points you to the salvation you have in Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection, and you are able to bear your crosses, knowing that even if it does not happen quickly, or even in this lifetime, things will work out for those who believe in Jesus Christ. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.