

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobnier, Illinois
Pentecost 13A - Proper 17A
August 30, 2020
Matthew 16:21-28

From Rock to Stumbling Block

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. 22 And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." 23 But he turned and said to Peter, "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." (Matthew 16:21-23 ESV)

In the Name of Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the living God, and only Savior of the world.

Last week, we heard Peter rightly confess of Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus then said, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven." Then Jesus gave him the name Peter and guaranteed the success of the Church. Wherever people confess Jesus as the Christ, He builds His Church. With such a commendation, Peter must have been on cloud nine.

But that great feeling didn't last long. For, as our text describes, Peter goes from cheers to chastisement, from commendation to condemnation. He goes from being a rock to being a stumbling block.

What happened? Jesus was now beginning to tell His disciples about His impending death and resurrection. He was explaining to them further what it means that He is "the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus understood perfectly well that it was necessary for a perfect sacrifice to be offered for the sins of the world. And He knew that He was that sacrifice. He knew that He would be handed over to "the elders, and chief priests and scribes" to suffer and die, for the Scriptures say "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." Unless He is enthroned on the accursed tree and unless He is offered on that altar as the Sacrifice of the ages, then their sins remain on the heads of all sinners. It is necessary that the Christ visit the upper room and the silent tomb. For unless He dies, He cannot rise from the dead. And if He doesn't rise from the dead, we are, of all men, to be pitied the most.

But his disciples, and especially Peter, didn't like what Jesus was saying and didn't want to hear it. They wanted Jesus to receive the glory and honor that was due the Son of the living God. Death and the cross had no place in their thinking. It was repulsive to them, just as it is to many in our day. They didn't understand what Isaiah had written concerning the Christ:

He is despised and rejected by men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed His stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. (Is 53:3-5)

They didn't understand that the Christ had to suffer and die for the sins of the world. They didn't understand that in Christ life follows death. So when Peter hears Jesus talking about dying, he takes Jesus aside to rebuke Him. Certainly Peter is being considerate taking Jesus aside. But in his rebuke Peter reverses the roles that had been established by Jesus. Peter now sets himself up as master and teacher and treats Jesus as a disciple and student. He reminds me of a teenager who, upon being told something by his parents, responds, "You don't know what you're talking about."

Yet, as Peter disagrees with Jesus, it's really Satan at work. Just a couple of years before when Satan had tempted Jesus in the wilderness, he tried to divert Jesus from the course laid out before Him. Satan tried to get Jesus to go against the will of God the Father. He wanted to keep Jesus from the cross. But he was unsuccessful. Jesus would not be kept from accomplishing His mission of dying on the cross to save all people from their sins.

Yet, in Peter's rebuke, we hear an echo from even longer ago. In the garden of Eden, God had told Adam, "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:17). Yet, Satan tempted Eve by saying, "You will not surely die" (Gen. 3:4). This was in direct opposition to what God had said. So it is that Jesus had declared that He would suffer, die, and rise from the dead. But Peter didn't want to hear that his Lord would die. He didn't even want to consider the possibility. So Peter says, "God have mercy. You won't die." Thus Satan was again trying to turn Jesus away from the cross.

And that's why Jesus said to Peter, "Get behind me Satan. You have in mind the things of man, not the things of God." What sharp words! Yet how true. The voice may have been Peter's, but the thoughts, the words, were of Satan. Indeed, Satan did not want Jesus to go to the cross. For he knew that would mean his downfall and defeat. Yet, Jesus would not let even Peter stop Him from accomplishing the task for which He had come, the salvation of the world from sin.

Now before we start thinking too badly of Peter, we need to take a look at ourselves. For quite often, we too are like Peter. One moment we make a faithful confession of Christ and the next we get in the way of Christ's work. Too often, we too would set ourselves over God and tell Him what's what. We get impatient with Him because He doesn't do what we want Him to do, how we want Him to do it, and when we want it done. We follow our own inclinations rather than God's Word. We would rather lead God than let God lead us. We too, even when hearing what God says, say, "No way. You don't know what you're talking about."

This happens when we refuse to be present in the Divine Service to hear God's Word and believe it. When we bear a grudge of some kind and are unforgiving. When we fail to be reconciled with one another. When we think, say, and do what *we* think is best, even when it is against God's revealed will. You see, we are all like Peter, trying to get God to agree with us rather than change our minds to agree with God. Thus we too become an offense, a stumbling-block, a trap to Christ and His work among us.

Now certainly we can't keep Jesus from going to the cross and rising from the dead. That's already happened. It's history. It is finished. But we still get in the way of Jesus' work when we seek to have our own way, when we don't want to hear about the cross. At such times, Jesus says, "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."

So if you trust in your own ideas, if you think you have the best or only way of thinking, then you too will find out how wrong you are, just as Peter did. For God does not leave us in our own sinfulness. He tells us about our sin so we may acknowledge it and confess it and receive His forgiveness. For our ways are not God's ways, and our thoughts are not His thoughts. And that's a good thing because our ways would lead to death and destruction, while God's ways lead to life and salvation.

That's why Jesus also says, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." Indeed, such a desire to follow Jesus stems from His gracious invitation. It is a desire that is created in us by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel. That's why to follow Jesus one must deny oneself, that is, to turn from our own thoughts and desires and to seek our Lord's Word and will. In a word it is repentance. We must not trust in our own goodness. We must deny that we can keep God's law and so satisfy Him. We must deny that our works earn God's favor. We must deny our inborn desire to dictate to God. Jesus here calls us to turn from ourselves and to Him alone. For He denied Himself when He suffered ridicule and rejection at the hands of the religious leaders. He suffered abandonment not only by His disciples, but most horribly by His Father. He took up His cross of sin and shame and guilt which weren't His. And as He did, He not only set an example for us of selfless love, but He earned forgiveness for our selfishness. By His death on the cross He atoned for our sins.

So let us learn to deny ourselves and to learn of Jesus and follow Him in all things. God grant that we not be stumbling blocks, but rather that we confess with our lips and our lives the full meaning that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener