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THE NECESSITY OF THE CROSS

Sermon for the 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, 2017

Matthew 16:21-28

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 16:21-28, our Gospel heard read before, <sup>21</sup> **From that time on, Jesus began to show His disciples that He had to go to Jerusalem, suffer greatly at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and be raised on the third day.**

<sup>22</sup> **However, Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, “May God in His mercy spare you this, Lord! This will certainly not happen to You.”**

<sup>23</sup> **However, Jesus turned and told Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me, because you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of human beings.”**

<sup>24</sup> **Then Jesus told His disciples, “If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me! <sup>25</sup> For whoever wants to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. <sup>26</sup> For what good will it do a person if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a person give in exchange for his soul?**

<sup>27</sup> **For the Son of Man is going to come in His Father’s glory with His angels, and then He will repay each person according to what he has done.**

<sup>28</sup> **Truly, I tell you that there are some of those who are standing here who will certainly not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The passion of Jesus was quickly approaching. While He had spoken of it before, He had not done so as definitely as He does now to His disciples. In speaking of His death, He had often used figurative language. For example, He had declared that He was the Good Shepherd, and that the Good Shepherd

would lay down His life for the sheep.<sup>1</sup> He had told Nicodemus, “*As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up,*” (John 3:14). He had spoken of the Bridegroom being taken away from His friends.<sup>2</sup> Here, however, He says plainly and clearly to His disciples that **He had to go to Jerusalem, suffer greatly at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed**. At the same time, He speaks also of the cross of the believer. Christ bore His cross for us, and He tells us that we must bear our cross for Him.

Jesus had a full knowledge of what would happen to Him as the Christ. He had left the heavenly home and taken upon Himself the flesh and blood of man for one purpose only. That was to live a perfect, spotless life in the sinners’ stead, and to suffer and die for the transgressions of men. Jesus was about to enter upon His passion, and the time had arrived for Him to tell His disciples all about this in definite, clear, and unmistakable words. This is what He now did.<sup>21</sup> **From that time on, Jesus began to show His disciples that He had to go to Jerusalem, suffer greatly at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and be raised on the third day**. Jesus thus stated that He was to **suffer greatly** and that the sufferings would end in His death: He would be killed.

The Old Testament had foretold the sufferings of the Christ. One of the chief passages is found in Isaiah 53. There Isaiah foretold what was to happen to the Saviour, such as being despised, bearing our griefs and carrying our sorrows. Being smitten by God, and afflicted. Oppressed and afflicted, like a lamb that is led to the slaughter. These things were to happen, and the fulfilment shows these were the things He suffered. There was the night in Gethsemane, there was the betrayal by His false friend Judas, there was the denial of Peter, there was the mocking and the spitting and the scourging, there was the unjust judgment before the court of the high priest and the court of the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, there was the burden of bearing His own cross to Calvary, and there was the shame and pain of the cross.

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<sup>1</sup> John 10:11

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 9:15

Jesus **had to go to Jerusalem**. It was a necessity that our Lord should die. Jesus was not forced to go to Jerusalem; He went of His own free will. It was His own choice to go there. His disciples could not persuade Him to stay away. Why, then, was it so necessary that the Lord should go to Jerusalem? This going to His cross was a divine necessity. It sprang from the love of God for sinful man. Before the foundation of the world He had determined to save sinners. Therefore He had promised to send His Son for our salvation. This promise had now been partly fulfilled. The Son of God had come into the world and had lived in perfect obedience to His Father to make atonement for man's disobedience. But more had still to be done by Him that man might be redeemed. The Son of God had to die in man's place. This was included in the divine plan for our redemption. Because He was determined to carry out the Father's will and work as His Anointed and to save the world in the only way in which it could be saved, He had to go to Jerusalem to die, laying down His life as a ransom for the sins of the world.

Yet Jesus did not speak only of His death; He also said that He would be **raised on the third day**. The resurrection of Jesus on the third day was therefore just as much a necessity as His death. Our text does not tell us how the disciples reacted to this announcement. It appears that the true sense of the words about the Lord's resurrection, like the full meaning of the words about His death, was hidden from them by the confused conception they had of what the Christ should do and of what His kingdom should be. This is borne out by Peter's words, for **Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, "May God in His mercy spare you this, Lord! This will certainly not happen to You."**

At this particular time Peter did not see the necessity of the cross of Jesus. He had not fully learned how much every sinner, including himself, needed the cleansing and atoning blood of the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. Just before Jesus made this statement about His suffering and death, He had called Peter "*blessed*," because of the confession, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*"<sup>3</sup> Jesus had told Peter that "flesh and blood" had not

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 16:16

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revealed this to him, but His Father which is in heaven. Yet now, so soon afterwards, Peter is very much guided by “flesh and blood.”

Not only his natural love for Jesus, but also the fleshly, mistaken hope that He would set up an earthly kingdom at Jerusalem moved Peter to rebuke his Lord so readily.

Peter meant well, but without being aware of it he was interfering with the Saviour’s office and work. He was trying to stop Jesus from doing what He had come to do. In effect, though with a good motive, He was doing what Satan did when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness. Hence it is not surprising that our Lord used the same words against Peter as He used against Satan: **“Get behind Me, Satan!”** In spite of his good intentions, Peter had unwittingly put himself on Satan’s side. What a warning this is to us all! How often do we not act just like Peter! We take the view that God could have done things differently; we think we know better than God what is good for us.

Jesus refused to listen to Peter. He resisted this temptation as He had resisted the temptations in the wilderness. He was determined to carry out the divine plan of salvation. Not only did He say to Peter, **“Get behind Me, Satan!”** but He added, **“You are a stumbling block to Me, because you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of human beings.”** Peter had spoken according to his carnal reason and will. He had not weighed what the Lord had said about His suffering and death, namely, that this was the Father’s will. Similarly; many today refuse to believe that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. They follow their natural understanding in divine things. They are quite willing to concede that Jesus is a good man, a great teacher, or an able social reformer. But when we speak of the necessity of Jesus’ death for men’s sins; when we speak of the utter depravity of the natural man; when we speak of the need of sorrow for sin, the need of confession of sin, and the need of forgiveness; when we speak of salvation only by faith in the cleansing blood of Jesus, then many no longer agree with us. Today, when the world desires a crossless Christ; when sinister forces are hard at work undermining the foundation of our Christian faith; when modern religion wants to retain the beautiful martyr Jesus but not the blood-stained God-man of Calvary, we must

witness for this truth. We must lift the crucified, sinless Son of God up high as the only source of saving truth and the only Saviour of mankind.

Peter later became a valiant champion of the saving power of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection. These truths were to him holy and blessed. All teachings contrary to these truths were to him evil, dangerous, and satanic. Finally, he laid down his life as a martyr to the saving truth of the cross of Christ.

Jesus bore the cross for us. That was a necessity for our salvation. Our text tells us also of the necessity of the believer to bear his cross. First of all Jesus says, **“If anyone wants to come after me, let him deny himself.”**

When a man becomes a believer by the Holy Spirit's working through the Word of God, he is sorry for his sins, repents of them, and holds fast to Christ and the cross for forgiveness. His former life was self-centred. Now it is Christ-centred and cross-centred. Now he denies himself. He endeavours to leave off, not only a few special sins, a few sinful desires or habits, but he endeavours to deny his whole natural sinful self that lives only for earthly matters, earthly appetites, earthly passions, and earthly ambitions. ‘Self’ is no longer the true Christian's master. The natural self is the old man. The true believer puts on the new man. The denial of the old man is the first lesson in sanctification we learn in the Saviour's school. Now for the second lesson.

Jesus says that the believer must **take up his cross.** What is this cross? There are troubles that come much in the same way upon all men, whether they are believers or unbelievers. There is bereavement, sickness, poverty, financial loss, disappointment, the adversity that comes on whole nations in times of war and of financial depressions. When these ills come upon the believer, they are the cross he bears after Jesus, but which his Saviour helps him to bear. Does surely, at such times, we cast all our cares upon the Lord, who cares for us.<sup>4</sup> However, the cross of which Jesus speaks here is chiefly the cross that comes upon Christians because they are followers of the Lord. The things that are suffered for Christ's sake are meant. The apostles, including Peter, experienced this cross. Because of their faithfulness to Christ they were

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<sup>4</sup> Psalm 55:22

despised, defamed, buffeted, imprisoned, made as the filth of the world, and all, excepting John, were ultimately put to death. That cross was the lot of thousands of martyrs who were imprisoned, burnt at the stake, crucified, thrown to the lions, and shot by firing squads - all because of their faith in Christ.

Thank God, we in our country are spared the severe cross that many have borne in the past and others are bearing at the present time. But this can quickly change. Those proponents of same-sex unions gleefully mock at and ridicule our church going, our Bible-reading, and our godly living. They sneer at our warning of changing God's definition of marriage. But that is a cross we shall have to bear. A clear testimony in word and life will always call forth the enmity of the world. And even in the church those who zealously practice their Christianity may be attacked by false brethren. This cross is quite common. If you admonish a weak brother, you will not always get his thanks. Very often, sad to say, you will receive abuse. Admonish your erring brother to go to church regularly, tell him not to attach his heart to his money or worldly goods, and you will not be spared the cross.

Jesus teaches a third lesson. He says simply, **follow Me!**

He is not only your Saviour from sin through His blood shed on the cross for you; He is also your great example. You must believe His Word and continue in it. He says, "*If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,*<sup>32</sup> *and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*" (John 8:31). You must follow Him in your life. In all that He has called you to be - butcher, baker, candlestick maker - He wants you to continue in your honourable calling. At the same time, you are to live unto Christ by your love for His Word and Sacraments, by the purity and godliness of the words of your mouth, and by proving your faith by God-pleasing deeds.

Our Lord emphasises the importance of what He has said by adding, "**For whoever wants to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.**" If we wish to enjoy life in the manner of the world and refuse to deny ourselves, we will lose the true and real life in Christ. We cannot lead a double life by trying to serve two masters. No, we cannot serve sinful self and the world, and still be followers of Christ. The words of Christ

clearly state that this is impossible. A man cannot be a lover of money and riches and a lover of God at the same time. Those who live a life of intemperance in eating and drinking cannot be following Jesus. If a man follows and enjoys a life of vice and continues in it, eternal life will never be his. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus reminds us of that.<sup>5</sup> The rich man tried to save his life. He lived only for good food, good drink, good clothes, and Jesus tells us to what this led to. How self-sacrificing, on the one hand, was the life of the apostles and of the thousands of martyrs who laid down their lives for Christ's sake! These said "no" to the enticing joys of the world. They were happy to suffer for their faith, and they found real and satisfying life here on earth and hereafter in heaven.

Once more the Lord Jesus stresses the importance of His words: **"For what good will it do a person if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a person give in exchange for his soul?"** If a man could have all the wealth, power, pleasure, honour, and glory of the world, if he had all enjoyments, all achievements, all satisfactions that the world has to offer, what would that help him if he lost his immortal soul and in the end would have to spend eternity in hell? It would profit him nothing. The child of God, on the other hand, has great gain. He concerns himself first and foremost with the welfare of his soul. Knowing that material things profit his soul nothing, he seeks and finds the great gain of heaven in the purchase price of his soul, the blood of Jesus Christ shed for him on the cross.

Our Saviour impresses this lesson on us by means of the parable of the rich fool in Luke 12 who tore down his barns to build bigger ones after receiving a bumper crop. *"I shall eat, drink, and be merry,"* he thought to himself, believing he had more than enough goods to see him ease through life.<sup>20</sup> But God said to him, *"Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?"*<sup>21</sup> *So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God,"* (Luke 12:20-21).

Dear friends, let us be rich toward God. Let us strive after the things that profit our soul. With the Holy Spirit's help let us for our salvation seek, find,

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<sup>5</sup> Luke 16:19-31

and live to the cross of Christ. Let us willingly deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him who is our Lord and Saviour. May our life become more and more a cross-centred life until we leave this world of temptation and sorrow, and enter the perfection and joy of heaven, where there will be no pangs and no pains, no sighs and no sorrows, no tears and no tribulations, and where we shall join the angels and the saints in the song of eternity which glorifies the cross of Christ, "*Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.*"<sup>6</sup> Amen.

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

#### PRAYER FOR THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

O Lord, we thank You for all Your goodness to us, but especially for the gift of Your Word and for the knowledge that we have of You through its message. We thank You for teaching us Your commandments, but, far more, we thank You for showing Yourself and Your limitless grace to us in Jesus Christ Your Son. Enable us to listen to Him in faith and to obey Him in love.

Send forth Your Word into our world today. Open doors of opportunity for us, and equip us to be active witnesses to Your Gospel, so that more and more may come to know Jesus Christ. Sow Your Word in the hearts and minds of people everywhere. Change their blindness to sight. Change their enslavement to sin, Satan, and death into the freedom that Christ alone gives.

Heavenly Father, let Your Word, as a living power, judge the thoughts and desires of our hearts. Increase our knowledge of what is good, and strengthen us to examine ourselves, amend our lives, and give up our pet sins. Grant that, through feeding on Jesus, the Son of Man, we may remain in Him, and He in us, and that, remaining in Him, we may be guided by His Word, and bring forth abundant fruit.

Keep the nations of the earth in peace. Turn people's hearts everywhere away from war, terrorism, and other wickedness. We pray, in particular, for those

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<sup>6</sup> Revelation 5:12



who are our country's leaders. Grant that our liberties may be kept safe, our laws upheld, injustice suppressed, and lawlessness punished. Frustrate the designs of those who wish to change the definition of marriage.

Let Your Word shine in our homes, that parents and children may live together in love, serve one another in kindness, and experience true joy, both in this life and the one to come.

Give the Spirit of Christ to all who are facing sickness, sorrow, hardship or need. Grant that they may find You quick to strengthen and bless them, and lead them to praise You for doing everything well.

Look upon the earth in pity and send us drought breaking rain.

Continue to keep us by the power of Your Holy Spirit; comfort us by Your Gospel, and sustain us by Your love.

This we pray in the name of Jesus, who gave Himself for us, that we might live through Him, and praise You for ever and ever. Amen.

### 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Jeremiah 15:15-21

<sup>15</sup> LORD, you understand. Remember me and take care of me! Take revenge on my behalf against those who are persecuting me! Because You are slow to become angry, do not take me away! Realise that I am suffering insults because of You! <sup>16</sup> Your Words were found, and I devoured them. Your Words have become my joy and the delight of my heart. For Your name has been called over me, O LORD, God of hosts. <sup>17</sup> I have not been sitting in the company of revellers. I have not been expressing delight. I have been sitting alone, because Your hand has been on me. For You have filled me with indignation. <sup>18</sup> Why has my pain been endless, and my wound been incurable, refusing to be healed? Will You really

be like an intermittent stream to me, like water that is unreliable?

<sup>19</sup> Therefore this is what the LORD has said: "If you return, I shall take you back, and you will stand before Me. If you separate what is precious from what is worthless, you will be My spokesman. Those people should come back to you, but you yourself shall not go back to them!" <sup>20</sup> I shall make you a fortified wall of bronze to this people. They will fight against you, but they will not defeat you. For I am with you to save you and rescue you," declares the LORD. <sup>21</sup> "I shall rescue you from the hands of wicked people, and redeem you from the grasp of ruthless people."

Romans 12:9-21

<sup>9</sup> Love must be sincere! Hate what is evil! Cling to what is good! <sup>10</sup> Be devoted to one another with brotherly

love! Honour one another above yourselves! <sup>11</sup> Do not be timid in your zeal! Be fervent in spirit; and serve the Lord! <sup>12</sup> Be joyful in your hope! Be patient in trouble; and persevere in prayer! <sup>13</sup> Share with God's holy people who are in need! Eagerly welcome strangers as guests! <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> Be in agreement with one another! Do not be proud, but accommodate yourselves to humble people! Do not think that you are wise! <sup>17</sup> Do not repay anyone evil for evil! Take into consideration what all people regard as good! <sup>18</sup> If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with all people! <sup>19</sup> Do not take revenge, dearly loved people, but leave room for God's wrath! For Scripture has said: "Vengeance belongs to Me. I shall repay," says the Lord. <sup>20</sup> Rather, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him! If he is thirsty, give him a drink! If you do this, you will heap burning coals on his head." <sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good!

Matthew 16:21-28

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Jerusalem, suffer greatly at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and be raised on the third day.

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