

INTROIT: Psalm 26

P Vindicate me, O LORD! For I have been walking in my integrity,
C **and I trust in the LORD. I shall not waver.**
P Test me, O LORD, and try me!
C **Examine my secret parts and my heart!**
P For Your mercy is before my eyes,
C **and I have been walking in Your truth.**
P I have not been sitting with deceitful people,
C **and I shall not associate with hypocrites.**
P I hate the assembly of evildoers,
C **and I shall not sit with wicked people.**
P I shall wash my hands in innocence,
C **that I may walk around Your altar, O LORD,**
P that I may proclaim a song of thanksgiving,
C **and tell about all Your wonderful deeds.**
P O LORD, I love the house where You live,
C **the place where Your glory dwells.**
P Do not sweep my soul away with sinners,
C **or my life with bloodthirsty people!**
P They have an evil scheme in their hands,
C **and their right hands are full of bribes.**
P However, I myself shall walk in my integrity.
C **Redeem me and be gracious to me!**
P My foot has been standing on level ground.
All: **I shall bless the LORD in the assemblies.**

COLLECT: Almighty God, Your Son willingly endured the agony and shame of the cross for our redemption. Grant us courage to take up our cross daily and follow Him wherever He leads; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

READINGS:

Old Testament: Jeremiah 15:15-21.

Epistle: Romans 12:9-21.

Gospel: Matthew 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 for this Sunday is written in the book of Matthew 16: which was our gospel reading before

21 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.

22 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."

23 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.”

24 Then Jesus told His disciples, “If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me! **25** For whoever wants to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. **26** 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? **27** 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. **28** 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,
Peace be with you

There are times when I think about how hard it must be to assign readings for the various days of the church year. I am very thankful for the admirable job that our church fathers have done in creating a lectionary that fairly represents the teachings of the Bible over the course of three years in the case of the Three Year Lectionary. At the same time, we should also remember that every reading happens within a context. There is the context of the rest of the book ... the context of the Bible as a whole ... and the context of the culture of the author and the original audience of the book. The Gospel reading that we just heard has even more to teach us when we consider it as a continuation of the Gospel we heard last week.

Last week, we heard that marvellous confession by Peter: “**You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.**” [Luke 16:16.] You may recall that Jesus praised God the Father for revealing this special confession to Peter. Then Jesus sternly warned the disciples not to tell anyone about this confession. As we read the rest of the Gospel accounts, we learn that Jesus regularly told people to keep His identity to themselves. It almost seems as though Jesus did not want people to know that He was the promised Messiah or Christ. This statement is a bit of a puzzle to many people. Why wouldn’t Jesus want people to know His true identity? Why did He strongly warn people not to tell others about Him?

Today, we hear the answer to that question. The disciples got the words right when they confessed that Jesus is the Christ, but they did not know what those words meant. If you read last week’s Gospel and this week’s Gospel together, you understand that right after Peter made this marvellous “*ὁμολογία, homologia*,” confession, 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. Basically, Jesus had heard this great confession and now He wanted the disciples to understand what it means to be the Christ. It means suffering, death, and resurrection. It means taking your sin onto Himself and carrying it to the cross.

Peter in his usual manner showed that he and the disciples really didn't get it. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “**May God in His mercy spare you this, Lord! This will certainly not happen to You.**” That word rebuke is just a fancy way of saying that Peter gave Jesus a bit of a blast! Think about that for just a minute. Peter is the one whose mouth confessed that Jesus is the **Almighty Son of the living God**. Then, just five verses later, that same Peter is chewing out the Almighty Son of the living God! ... the one through whom all things were created. It becomes very obvious that the title Christ means one thing to Jesus and something entirely different to Peter.

Jesus lost no time in straightening out Peter's theology. He turned and said to 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.”** Now there's a lot in this reply.

First of all, Jesus demonstrates zero tolerance for false teaching. We live in a world that has corrupted tolerance, into the encouragement of any and every activity that the sinful mind of man can imagine. Consenting adults can agree to any activity, and this corrupted form of tolerance requires us to celebrate their activity no matter how stupid or immoral that activity may be. Jesus may not be very politically correct, but He is, **THE** authority on the subject of theology and morality.

Second of all, the reference to Satan is not just a figure of speech. The devil regularly tempted Jesus throughout His ministry. The basic premise of those temptations was for Jesus to take a short cut that allowed Him to accomplish His mission while avoiding the cross. That's what the temptations in the wilderness were all about ... when the devil offered to crown Jesus as the king of the entire world if He would simply fall down and worship him. Peter was actually acting as an agent of Satan by chewing out Jesus for talking about the cross.

There have always been many false teachings in the world and things are no different today. Most of the false teachings that seem so new today are really ancient heresies that have been remarketed with new names and appearances, but with the same old lies. Most of them are wrong ideas about what it means to be the Christ. Some teach that Jesus was only a man. Others teach that Jesus did not become fully human, but only took on the appearance of a man, and still others teach that Jesus only appeared to die on the cross.

Then there are those who teach that Jesus didn't earn our full salvation on the cross. Instead, His death on the cross gave us the power to save ourselves. **AND** there are many, many more. The point is that Satan and his demons often try to deprive us of our salvation by depriving us of a true understanding of what it means that Jesus is the Christ.

All four Gospel accounts tell us that Jesus often explained what it means to be the Christ ... that he regularly spoke of His suffering and death. Those same Gospel accounts tell us that the disciples were unable to understand this meaning until after the events happened. It was not until after Jesus rose from the dead that the disciples began to understand the true meaning of what it means to be the Christ. It was on the day of His resurrection that **"He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, “This is what Scripture has said: ‘The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day; [Luke 24:446.] It was when they understood this that Jesus told them, "However, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the world.” [Acts 1:8.]** It was after they understood that the Christ is about suffering, death, and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins that Jesus sent them as witnesses – that Jesus sent them to tell the world that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

This is the golden thread that forms 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 that offers forgiveness, life, and salvation to us.

The devil wants to take this love letter away from us. He continues to work through his agents in order to tempt us to abandon the Christ. That's what Jesus was talking about when He said, **“If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me!** When Jesus talks about the cross we bear, He's not talking about the type of hardships that sin brings to everyone in this world. He's not talking about illnesses, family squabbles, economic hardships, injuries and so forth. He's not even talking

about death. Instead, He's specifically talking about the difficulties that we have simply because we are Christians.

When we think about the cross that Christians carry, we often think about the persecution of the church in this world. The violence in the Middle East is just one example of the persecution of Christ in the world today. A quick check with Voice of the Martyrs [*check out their home page on Google*] informs us that Christians die for their faith all around the world. There are many nations in this world where Christianity carries the death sentence by the law of the land. There are other countries where Christianity is legal, but law enforcement will look the other way if a crime is committed against a Christian. We in the west have been fairly blessed to avoid such persecution for now, but at the rate things are going in this nation, our children and grandchildren may be asked to surrender their lives for the sake of the cross.

As bad as all of this is, it's not the most dangerous cross we face. The most dangerous cross comes from within. Our own sinful nature works to convince us that the plan of salvation laid out in the Bible just doesn't make sense. It insists that God's plan of salvation should conform to our wants, our desires, our felt needs, our theology. Our sinful nature wants to judge itself according to its own rules and not according to God's rules. Instead of relying on God's word and promises, our sinful nature wants to judge God. Does God's way make me healthy, wealthy, and wise? Does it make me feel good? Does it conform to OUR modern day society? Our sinful nature wants us to forget about what God said and rely on our own feelings instead. This cross is actually more dangerous than outward persecution. When we deny the true meaning of what it means to be the Christ and His word, we reject the very forgiveness, life, and salvation that Jesus earned for us by being true to His mission as the Christ ... by suffering and then rising from the dead.

The devil used Peter to tempt Jesus to give up the mission of The Christ. 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 that he received from God the Father Almighty. He understood it so well that 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 that 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 us and we will always be with Him. Amen.

The peace of God, which is beyond all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
Amen.

3rd Hymn: 171,

Prayer of the Church 13th Sunday after Pentecost

P Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Brief silence

P For honest and faithful labour, that God would continue to provide His children with work that is fulfilling and beneficial to their neighbours, let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

P For those who labour, that God would strengthen them to outdo one another in showing honour, guard them against slothfulness, and let them live peaceably with all, let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

P For those who are underemployed, that God would grant them peace and purpose in the work they carry out and provide new opportunities for service, let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

P For those who are unemployed, that God would bolster their faith and continue to give them each day their daily bread, that they might find comfort in His provisions and take heart in their worth as His children, let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

P For labourers for the harvest, that God would continue to set apart faithful men to serve as pastors and to serve as Elders ; that He would continue to support our Sunday School's faithful teachers, and that He would grant His servants joy in their vocations, let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

P For those who labour in the government, that through their service, God would provide our country with safety and stability, that You would protect them in carrying out their duties and enable them to serve with wisdom and honour according to Your Word, let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

P For all those who cry out to You in their time of need [*especially:* _____]. Grant each one Your peace, Your healing and Your comfort. let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

P For all who approach the Lord's table this day, that God would create in them a right spirit for reception of Christ's true body and blood, that each time they receive His good gift of forgiveness they would be strengthened to deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Him, let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

P For the faithful departed, let us give our thanks and praise, asking that we might at last join them in the feast of joy in the light of the Kingdom, let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

P Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C Amen.

4th Hymn: 339