

Season after PENTECOST

Collect of the Day

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.

Scripture Readings

Psalm 26 (antiphon v. 8)

Jeremiah 15:15-21

Romans 12:9-21

Matthew 16:21-28

Hymns

Hymn of the Day – 531

Other Hymns – 655 (OT), 649 (E), 501 (E), 685 (G), 688 (G), 718 (G)

Prayers

O Lord, You have promised to hear and answer the prayers of Your people. With confidence in Your Word, we come before Your throne of grace with petitions and supplications on behalf of Your people and all people as they have need.

Grant grace to the earth, that it may be fruitful and supply the needs of all people. As You have given life to the seed and brought forth the first bud of the plants of the field, so deliver us from drought and famine and bring forth a rich harvest to satisfy the hungry with the good things of Your creation. Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Deliver us from our enemies and from all evils that may befall the body or afflict the soul. Teach us to love You above all things and to love our neighbours as ourselves so that we may display Your goodness to the world and glorify Your holy name by our words and our deeds. Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Give us patience in tribulation and restore to us the joy of Your salvation. Comfort the weeping with Your loving kindness, console the grieving with the hope of the resurrection and help us to live in harmony with one another even as we welcome the stranger with hospitality. Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Bless Your Church with Your Spirit and His gifts that Your people may raise up Christ and His cross before the world. Bless all pastors and church workers and their service in Your name. Lead all of Your baptised to deny themselves and take up the cross that, when our Lord comes in His glory, we may be found faithful. Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

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Deliver the world from the voices of anger, dispute and hate that instigate violence and threaten the safety of people in their homes, schools and workplaces. Give Your blessing to those who lead us in this land and to all the nations and peoples of the world, that justice, freedom and respect may be multiplied and the weak and the unborn preserved from harm. Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

On this Labour Day weekend we implore You to protect all who are travelling that their ways may be safe and their homecomings joyful; to bless those who maintain the industries and service sectors of this land that they may have a right regard for their labours and receive just payment for their work; and to be with those who teach and those who learn in the schools of our province that resume this week. Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Hear us for all those who cry to You in their need. Heal the sick, relieve the suffering, comfort the mourning and guide the dying to peace in Christ [especially Your servants _____]. Restore those wounded in body or soul with Your abundant grace, and according to Your will deliver them from all their troubles. Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

All this and whatever else is needful for this body and life we pray You to grant us in the name of and for the sake of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. To Him be all glory with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Season after **PENTECOST SERMON**

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (Series A)

Sermon Text: Matthew 16:21-28

“The Things of God”

How quickly things change. In last week’s Gospel lesson we heard St. Peter’s great confession. When Jesus asked the disciples who they say He is, Peter confessed, *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”* Jesus called Peter blessed. He taught that God the Father had given this rock solid confession to Peter and said that the entire church would be built upon it.

Now, only five verses later, Peter is telling Jesus how to operate His plan of salvation. Last week we see Peter allowing God to work through him as he boldly and faithfully made his confession about the Christ. This week we see Peter allowing Satan to work through him. How quickly Peter went from being a rock to a stumbling block; a hindrance.

You see, Satan was always working to find ways to convince Jesus to ‘take the easy way out’ and avoid going to the Cross. We observe this especially when Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness. Among other false promises, Jesus was offered the entire world if He would worship Satan just once. That was Satan’s deception - that if Jesus did what Satan proposed and ‘took the easy way out,’ He could have a smooth road of earthly power. Giving in to any one of Satan’s temptations would have sullied Jesus’ sinlessness and would mean that God’s plan of salvation would not be fulfilled. But Jesus had set His mind on the things of God, not the things of man, and answered the Devil’s false claims with, *“Be gone, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve’.”*

Peter didn’t know it, but he was tempting Jesus in the same way when he said, *“Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.”* In other words, ‘Avoid the cross and take the easy way. You are God. You are all powerful. Just force your way into control of your kingdom. This talk of suffering and death makes no sense and it shall never happen to you.’ It was bad enough to hear this temptation from the Adversary, but to hear it from one of His disciples—that had to be tough.

Peter thought that he was helping by offering Jesus the easy path instead of the Divine one of the Son of Man being oppressed and afflicted to pay for our sin. But he was just getting in the way. We too can think we are helping God and His Divine plan of saving the world by setting aside His Word to teach and confess things that are easier, more agreeable, more understandable. But when we do this, we too are just getting in the way.

Jesus rebuked Peter in much the same way He rebuked the devil, *"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."* And just as Peter fell into the mindset of 'taking the easy way out,' so can we. When Satan deceives us with promises of a smooth and easy road, Jesus says, *"set your mind on the things of God; not on the things of man."*

When Satan tempts us to avoid, ignore, and deny the needs of others in order to look after our own comfort, or to act in anger and hold a grudge instead of seeking reconciliation, God's Word points us to the Fifth Commandment where we are reminded that, *"We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt our neighbour in his body, but help and support him in every physical need."*

When Satan tempts us to spread gossip that tears others down in order to make ourselves look better, God's Word points us to the Eighth Commandment where we are reminded that, *"We should fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbour, betray him, slander him, or hurt his reputation, but defend him, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way."*

At the time of Jesus' and Peter's exchange in our Gospel reading, there were many ideas and teachings and expectations going around about the promised Messiah, but none of them included a suffering and dying One. 'Suffering' and 'dying' and 'Messiah' simply did not go together in their minds. They were expecting, and wanted, a mighty conquerer king who would come with power and might to defeat all of their enemies and give them the good life. They thought that being one of Jesus' followers meant that they would be on top of the world.

This view is still alive and well today and many adhere to it. This dangerous doctrine teaches that, as a follower of Jesus, God will bless you with prosperity and abundance in this life. And it isn't surprising that this message is popular. Who doesn't want to hear that as a follower of Christ you will be healthy, and you will have a nice house, nice car, everything you want?

But is that why Jesus came into the world? Did He suffer and die on the cross so that we could have nice things in this life? Unfortunately, as we heard in our text, Peter had fallen into this understanding of things. But, to this type of thinking our Lord responds, *"For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?"* To this type of thinking our Lord responds, *"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."*

No, Jesus did not promise that as His people life would be easy. Instead, He teaches that we have a cross to carry in this life. What that cross looks like in our lives varies, but our daily struggle with sin, of denying ourselves, is part of it. Our death is part of it.

No, Jesus doesn't promise an easy life. He doesn't promise to lift and remove us from the hardships we face. But He does promise that no matter what we endure in this life, even the most horrible and difficult things we experience—we will prevail in His name.

Instead of the easy path, Jesus Himself chose the way of service and obedience and suffering to save the world—to save you. And now He calls us to follow Him in that way of obedience and suffering, to deny our sinful desires whenever and wherever they show up.

Suffering and death, taking up one's cross, losing one's life sounded strange to Peter and the disciples, and it sounds strange to us too. But the cross is not the end. Through it we gain true life.

To be sure, sin and evil had its way, but only for a short time. Death was not the end for Jesus who on the third day was raised. Sin and evil and death is not the end for us. The end is being raised to eternal life in God's kingdom.

Take up the crosses that come upon you, therefore, knowing that you are not alone as you carry them. Knowing that the One we follow is leading us to Himself and to life everlasting. Set your minds on the things of God—set your minds on His Commandments, His love, His forgiveness, and His gift of eternal life. Amen.