

The Way of Cross is God's Plan of Salvation

September 3, 2023

Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church

Pastor Tyson Labuhn

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

Today's gospel reading comes after Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. Peter got it right, but just as when he faltered while walking on water, he lost focus on Jesus.

It all began when 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” (v.21). Jesus was starting to focus on His purpose and wanted them to know that the way of the cross that comes at a price is God's plan of salvation for all.

Now Peter, like many others at the time, believed that Christ came to conquer and vanquish Israel's enemies, and usher in a new era. So, when Jesus said He must go to Jerusalem to suffer and die, it was worse than a football coach telling his team before the game that they were going to lose. So, thinking that Jesus needed some coaching, Peter took Jesus aside and tried to talk Him out of it. Now, the text does not tell us whether Peter's objection stemmed from his view of Messiah, his sense of glory and righteousness, or out of love and respect for Jesus. But it tells us that Peter rebuked Jesus, saying to Him, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you” (v.22).

Many of us have this tendency: to think that God should do things in the way that we would do them. Sometimes we try to second-guess God's decisions. We might even pray that God would simply deal with this world and all its evils by using His power, strength, and might to overcome the problems of the world because if we were the ones in control, we could accomplish what we want, how we want it, and the way that we think things ought to be. And while we might say that this kind of ambition is good, it often comes from a critical, competitive, and judgmental spirit that presumes that we know better than God Himself.

Yet, the way of the cross comes at a costly price, and it is God's plan of salvation for all. So Jesus turned to Peter and said, "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" (v.23). God's plan can be much different from our own, and Jesus had already faced Satan's temptation in the desert.

If you recall, Satan tempted Jesus to use His power for His own purpose by turning stones into loaves of bread. He wanted to have Jesus test the Father by tempting Him to jump from the pinnacle of the temple. And he offered Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if He would submit to him.

But Jesus remained committed to humble obedience in submission to the Will of God the Father instead of a life of glory and riches, or earthly kingdoms and armies. He willingly chose a life of service, a life of self-denial and suffering for our sins and the sins of the whole world, so we might be forgiven for all the times that we think, say, and do things that we think to be better than God's will. He willingly embraced death on the

cross, so that through His resurrection, all who believe in Him, even though they die, might have life in Him. That's why He urged 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" (v.24-25). Imagine how the disciples must have felt hearing these words. The cross was a form of capital punishment. It meant certain death, and to hear Jesus say these things, they must have been troubled. Yet, those disciples would courageously live out their lives in faith and speak in Jesus' name when they came under attack, experienced troubles, and encountered evil because they knew that the way of the cross comes at a price and is God's plan of salvation for all.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a revered Lutheran pastor and theologian, writes in his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*:

Jesus says that every Christian has his own cross waiting for him, a cross destined and appointed by God. Each must endure his allotted share of suffering and rejection. But each has a different share: some God deems worthy of the highest form of suffering, and gives them the grace of martyrdom, while others he does not allow to be tempted above that which they are able to bear. But it is the one and the same cross in every case. (p.44)

Like the disciples before us, we know the way of the cross has a cost and is God's salvation plan. Jesus calls us to courageously pick up our cross and follow Him. And while we might face troubles as we share the Good News of Jesus, we would be willing to die if necessary rather than giving up our faith in Him, as our Lord tells us today in our Gospel reading, "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?" (v.26).

But the cross is not the end; Jesus says, “The Son of Man is going to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will repay each person according to what he has done” (v.27). He goes on to say, “Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom” (v.28). Because some of the disciples who were there that day would see His Kingdom come when He rose from the dead; still others, like Peter, would also see it come on the day of Pentecost. And while they have gone before us, our ultimate purpose is to give glory to God, by living in His Kingdom, sharing His Gospel message, and preparing for that day when He will come again at the end of time, when we will live with Him both now and always.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.