

## Matthew 16:21-26

Pentecost 15; September 13, 2020

2020. What a year. Who would have guessed last year that we would be facing a pandemic that affected every country across the world? Over the last 6 months, we have become all too familiar with words like “virtual,” “Co-Vid,” “Contact tracing,” “Essential business,” “non-essential business,” “PPE,” and “Social Distancing.” Who would have guessed that we would be celebrating Confirmation today?

How about the fires going on in California? It’s kind of surreal for us watching some of the news video and pictures from the fires there. There are towns and roads that we had driven on only a couple of months ago that have been devastated by the fires. We drove past some of the campgrounds where people needed to be airlifted from.

Then there is the political climate that we see so often today. A climate that has become so antagonistic and even downright nasty at times. It doesn’t even seem to matter which side a person is on.

Then there are the personal challenges that have faced so many people. Challenges like job losses; Parents having to help teach their kids in this new virtual world; or working at home when there are so many distractions going on around you; or watching financial market that has been so wild at times. 2020 – what a year it has been? It’s been a year filled with so many crosses for so many people. What if 2020 was different? Wouldn’t it be great if so many people had fewer crosses to bear? Wouldn’t it be great to skip the cross and go straight to the glory?

In some ways, that is the feeling that Peter has in our Gospel Lesson for today. Our text picks up from where we left off last week. Last week, we saw Peter make that great confession of faith: **“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”** Jesus was everything that Peter could have hoped for. He had heard Jesus preach like no one else could. He listened to Jesus teach like no one else could. Then there were the miracles. Miracles that we have seen last week in the Gospel Lessons from Matthew. He saw Jesus feeding thousands. He saw Jesus walking on water and calming the winds and the waves. He saw Jesus heal a woman’s daughter from demon possession. If this Jesus could do all that, he could certainly get rid of the Roman army. They would once again be free from the control of someone else. This Jesus was everything that he had hoped for and even more.

Then Jesus said words that Peter did not like to hear. Matthew tells us that **“From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”** You can almost hear the wheels slamming on the brakes in Peter’s head. *Suffering many things? Must be killed?* This wasn’t what Peter had signed up for. This wasn’t the kind of God that Peter had been hoping for. God had finally come onto the scene. This picture of ruling and glory was just shattered in those words. How can you be sitting on a throne when you are dead?

But before we come down on Peter, we need to put ourselves in Peter’s shoes. Would we have said anything different? Can imagine if your best friend, your mentor, your teacher and your Savior comes to you and tells you that he has to **suffer many things and must be killed?** How would you respond? Okay? No, not okay! I think we would say the same thing that Peter said when he takes Jesus off to the side and says to him: **“Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!”**

Peter wanted Jesus to skip the cross and go straight to the glory. Peter didn’t want a dead Jesus. But that’s not what Jesus had come to do. Did you catch what Matthew said: **“that he MUST be killed?”** There were many things that Peter had already learned from Jesus, but he didn’t see the necessity of the cross being one of those things. He just could grasp why Jesus would have to die. That’s what Jesus wanted Peter, and us, to learn that day. **“Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”** Those are pretty strong words for Peter to hear.

But Peter needed to hear those words. Those words of Peter, **“This shall never happen to you,”** is exactly what Satan wanted. He didn’t want Jesus to die on a cross. Because he knew what dying on the cross by Jesus meant. It would mean the head of the serpent would be crushed. The death of the Messiah, the Son of the living God on the cross would

satisfy the payment for sin. That's the kind of Jesus that Peter needed and that we need. That was hard for Peter to see. It is hard for us to see at times. It is so tempting to want to skip the cross and go to the glory. But that's what Jesus has not promised. That is not what Jesus had to do.

Jesus never promised that there would not be crosses for the believer to bear in this world. He has never promised that our life will always be filled with happiness. He has never promised us that things will go the way that we want it to go in this life. He has not promised us that there will be no suffering for us. But what he does tell us is that we will not face those crosses alone. He does promise us that he will go with us. He promises to strengthen us as we take up our crosses and follow him. But cross-bearing is hard. Sometimes, we don't do it all too well. Sometimes, we would like to skip the cross and go straight to the glory.

When we don't do it so well, Jesus' arms are stretched out to us to forgive us. Jesus wanted Peter to trust him. He wanted Peter to trust him as he would carry crosses. He wanted Peter to see the love of God in the cross. He wanted to draw Peter closer to him as he would bear the crosses of his life. He wants to use our crosses to draw us closer to Jesus.

But Jesus also wanted Peter to wait. After the waiting in this world is over, there is a crown that's coming. That's the message of Jesus. That's the message that the Pastor and Teachers of St. Paul's to tell God's people – his sheep and his lambs. That the message that Jesus wants the Confirmands to carry with them for their entire life. You see, there is a crown that's coming. It's not about us. It's all about Jesus. May God help all of us to carry the crosses we bear in life to receive the crown of eternal life. Amen.