

PETER DIDN'T GET IT!
Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
Rev. Steven D. Spencer
Matthew 16:21-28

Grace, peace and mercy from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen!

In last week's appointed Gospel reading Peter got it right when he declared to Jesus, "**You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.**" Jesus called him "blessed," because this amazing confession of faith was given to him by God the Father.

But this week Jesus doesn't call Peter "blessed." He calls him "Satan." Peter's gets it wrong, very wrong indeed!

I. THE SIN OF PETER

Up until now, Jesus has been preparing the disciples for what He is about to say. He's been teaching with His Word and miracles. The evidence is compelling, and Peter has rightly determined who He is: "**the Christ, the Son of the living God.**" The disciples have figured out the "who" Jesus is, and now Jesus tells them the "where," the "why" and the "how:" Listen carefully to our text: "**From that time forward 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 be raised the third day**" (16:21).

Now, as for you and me, this is old news; but this was the first time the disciples heard of it. There's barely been any opposition to Jesus thus far: It's mostly been a time of teaching and wonderful miracles. But now, Jesus announces His suffering and death. How should the disciples respond?

If Peter has anything to say about it's not going to happen. It's up to him to straighten out the Savior; as a friend and as a disciple, he's got to talk some sense into Jesus. So he pulls Jesus aside to do just that: "**Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!**"

Without a doubt, Peter is greatly concerned for Jesus and really doesn't want Him to die. No one questions that Peter is acts out of best of intentions. Which is why the rebuke is so stinging: "**Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but things of men.**" It probably leaves Peter speechless. How could Jesus rebuke Peter, calling him the devil, no less! Peter only wanted what he thinks best for Jesus, right?

But, no matter what Peter has reasoned or how good his intentions, Peter's sin is the worst of all evils. Jesus' prophecy of His death is not some sort of crazy talk, it's the Father's perfect will. Spoken long ago, to Adam and Eve, God declared that the Savior would crush Satan's head and suffer Himself in the process (Gen. 3:15). It's the will of God that His Son goes to the cross and dies for the sins of the world.

So when Peter contradicts Jesus, even with the best of intentions, he's saying, "Lord, not Thy will be done, but my will be done. I know better than You, and Your way is the wrong way." When Peter challenges Jesus, he's saying that Jesus is wrong and that the Word of God which He speaks is false.

Let me put it another way. When Peter acts to prevent Jesus from going to that cross, he's actively trying to prevent the redemption of the entire world. He's blocking the way to the cross. He is attempting to keep you and me from being forgiven all of our sins. No wonder Jesus calls Peter "Satan:" This is exactly what the devil desires.

Peter is doing the devil's work, because Peter is following a most dangerous false god, which is himself. That sinful self is bad enough, because it daily wants to defy God's commands. In this case, however, it's committing a far greater evil: As long as Peter follows that little, blinded god called "self", he's lost in his trespasses and sins. And if he can block Jesus from the cross, then we all would be lost.

But there's hope for Peter. Jesus isn't going to do what Peter wants. He's going to do what Peter needs. He isn't going to do Peter's will, He's going to do His Father's will.

Jesus will go to Jerusalem. He will suffer many things from the elders and the scribes and the chief priests, those religious leaders who practice a false salvation. He will be nailed to a cross and He will die; and on the third day He will rise. He will not do this for Himself but for Peter and for you and for the whole world.

And listen carefully, because Jesus announces this salvation to His disciples: ***"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it."***

Understand this Peter, for this salvation is for you: Daily, you must deny yourself by the grace of God. In other words, you must daily confess your false reliance on self, your false good intentions and your selfish plans as the sins they are. You must deny yourself the sinful ideas that you have. Then you will take up your cross, because Jesus has given you His. He declares, "Not your will, Peter, because your will cannot save you. Not your will, but Mine be done. I have died your death because of your sin. I have given My life on a cross that was intended for you. Therefore, My death is your death. My cross is your cross; and if you carry my death and my cross by faith, then sin no longer holds you in death."

Peter will carry the cross of Jesus: He will walk in the forgiveness that Christ has won for him and for all on that cross (†). Though attacked by the world, the devil and his own sinful flesh, he will know that his sins are paid in full and that eternal life is sure. There will be suffering and hardship for Peter. But when he suffers he will be at peace-because Jesus has already endured the greater suffering for his sins, and has credited to Peter the victory won on that cross (†).

II. ST. PETER'S SINS TODAY

In the Small Catechism, Luther encourages us to begin and end each day in prayer. And, to begin those prayers, he advises us even us here in Salem, Oregon, to "make the sign of the holy cross." He further says, "When I urge you to go to confession, I am simply urging you to be a Christian" (LC, Brief Exhortation, 32). This is another way of repeating Jesus' teaching, ***"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."***

There's good reason for this. Daily, you are hunted and haunted by a persistent false god. It's constantly with you, and there is no escape on this side of the cross. It has an

attractive religion, this false god: It likes happiness and doesn't like unhappiness. It likes to avoid stressful situations and just can't stand matters that aren't enjoyable. It will constantly reassure you that it wants what's best for you, that it values you highly as an individual. Left unchecked, however, it will destroy you.

This false god is nothing other than your self-your sinful nature. You have met the enemy, and it is you. It is our sinful nature, our sinful self, that makes us so selfish, we are looking out for ourselves at the expense of all else and all others. Its why, in a room full of a hundred toys and two kids, one child will want the only toy that the other one is playing with! It's the selfish, its sinful nature at work.

It is why you naturally want the biggest slice of pizza, the piece of cake with the most frosting, and the parking spot closest to the door and it displeases you when somebody else gets it. It is why you'd rather have someone else do the really crummy chores, whether it's changing the diapers, taking out the garbage, or adding the toner at work. It's why you want to win the fight, even when you're wrong.

It cuts into church behavior, too. Your typical Old Adam will tell you that 8:45 is just too early for church while 11:00 would cut the day in half, and therefore church Bible Study is just too inconvenient to get to. It might also add that if worship is not attention-grabbing, it can't be good. The Old Adam will convince you that there are better things to use money for than offerings. When you are asked to serve on a committee or board at church, your sinful self can easily convince you that, even though it's got to be done and you could certainly do it, it wouldn't be all that enjoyable so you should decline and let somebody else do it instead.

Now, all these instances may be a source of a remorseful chuckle or an irritated groan. Furthermore, all of these are evidences of the sinful nature-that Old Adam inside of you that wants your will done and not God's will. More to the point, all of these are sin, and it is you and me, who are guilty. In other words, when we act in these ways, we cannot say, "I'm innocent, because I really am the one to blame." We can't be divorced from our sinful nature. We stand guilty before God.

This is why Jesus declares, ***"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."*** This isn't some terrible task; this is the life of a Christian. By the Law of God, we know what our old sinful nature is like, with all of its selfish tendencies. By the grace of God, we deny ourselves-we deny our sinful selves and the authority and respect for which the Old Adam yearns. We declare to the Lord that we are by nature sinful and unclean. We wish to follow our own will and desires, not His (point up), and we pray that He would forgive us for the sake of His crucified Son, Jesus Christ.

We say this, in many ways, with words like, *"I, a poor miserable sinner confess unto You all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended You,"* for this confesses our selfish sinfulness. We sing, *"Lord have mercy upon us,"* and *"O Christ have mercy upon us, Lamb of God that takest away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us,"* praying that He-who died for our sins-would forgive us.

And He does! You hear that truth proclaimed in words like these: *"In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all of your sins."* The pastor announces that Jesus forgives you-takes away your sins! Furthermore, he traces a cross toward you as he says them, to convey this awesome truth: You are forgiven because Christ has died your

death on the cross, and He has shared His death with you in Holy Baptism. His cross is your cross! This is the cross that you bear! St. Paul makes that clear in Galatians 2: **"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me"** (v.20). He also says in Romans 6, **"Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life"** (v. 4). Jesus has placed His cross and His victory over sin upon you, and that is the cross that you bear.

And that is why Luther advises us to draw that cross upon ourselves each morning and evening, that we might constantly remember that we bear His (†) cross, that we have died with Him (†) to sin. And because He pours out His grace and gives us faith, we daily confess our selfish sinfulness, put it to death once again, and live as His forgiven people.

So, like St. Peter, we cling to the Word of our Lord, the Word of Christ, the Son of the living God who suffered many things, died and rose again. Oh, rejoice to deny yourselves and confess your sins, for you do so knowing that the Lord has died to set you free from your selfish sinful nature that seeks to kill you forever. And rejoice, all the more, that the Lord has died your death and made His cross your cross; and that He gives His cross and life to you in His Word and His Sacraments. You will battle your sinful self each day, but the Lord is present with His grace; for He announces to you all your sins are forgiven in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, for Jesus sake you are forgiven. To Him be given all honor, glory and dominion now and forevermore, Amen and amen!

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