

Matthew 16:21-28
Pentecost 13 + Proper 17A + August 30, 2020
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho
Pastor Tim Pauls
What Jesus Does

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

We gave appropriate kudos to Peter last week, because he was the one who knew who Jesus is. Everybody else had it wrong, but it was Peter who boldly declared, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Yep, that was Peter. Also known as Simon, Bar-Jonah. This week, also known as, er, Satan.

Talk about a plot twist. Just six verses – not chapters, but *verses* – after saying to Peter, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah,” Jesus says to Peter, “Get behind me Satan! You are a hindrance to Me.”

What has happened? It’s this: it’s tremendous that Peter has got it right as to who Jesus is, but he’s completely wrong on what Jesus does.

Now that the disciples know that Jesus is the Savior, Jesus tells them how He’s going to save: we read, “From that time 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.”

That’s old news to you: you just said it in the creed like it was nothing new that Jesus “suffered also under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried.” But put yourself in Peter’s shoes, since he’s the one who’s said that Jesus is the Son of the living God. What sorts of things has the living God done? He’s created the heavens and the earth. He’s washed away the wicked with a flood. He’s afflicted the Egyptians with ten plagues and drowned Pharaoh in the Red Sea. He’s brought His people through the wilderness with signs and wonders, He’s given them the Ten Commandments with fire and thunder, and He’s had the earth just swallow up the disobedient. He’s handed His people the Promised Land on a silver platter as He’s given them victory over His enemies. When His people have rebelled, He’s sent judgment their way; and when they’ve repented, He’s vanquished their enemies.

When God has acted in the Old Testament, it’s been with plenty of power. Sinners have picked fights with the Lord time and time again, and He hasn’t lost a round.

Jesus, the Son of the living God, has done plenty of powerful things too. He’s turned water to wine and fed thousands with a little bread and fish. He’s made the blind see, the lame leap and the deaf hear. He’s raised the dead, walked on water and told storms just to knock it off. He tells demons to flee, and they do. When His enemies have confronted Him, they haven’t been able to lay a hand on Him. The Son of the living God has done these things to fulfill prophecies and to prove that He is, well, the Son of the living God.

With all of that in the background, the almighty, eternal, unbeatable Son of the living God tells the disciples that He’s going to be beaten by His enemies, suffer, be killed, and rise again on the third day. That’s going to sound so out-of-character for God that I’m pretty sure the rising-on-the-third-day part doesn’t even register.

Peter, the recently blessed son of Bar-Jonah, hears the contradiction, pulls Jesus aside and rebukes Him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you!" This isn't just a loving disciple who's horrified at the thought of a suffering friend. This is a disciple correcting his teacher and saying that the Son of God doesn't know what He's talking about. God doesn't suffer and die. God knocks heads together and takes names.

Therefore, thinks Peter, Jesus must be wrong, and it's only right for Peter to rebuke ... the Son of the living God; only to hear Jesus say, "Get behind me Satan! You are a hindrance to Me."

What's gone wrong? Last time, Peter was blessed because he got his doctrine from the Word of God, not somewhere else. This time, he's still getting his doctrine from Scripture, but he's only taking the parts that he likes and ignoring the rest. Yes, God has done a lot of powerful things throughout the Old Testament. He has also said that salvation will not come by power, but by sacrifice. When He first promises in Genesis 3 that the Messiah will bruise Satan's head as He defeats Him, He also says that the Messiah will get His heel bruised in the process. In Isaiah 53, the Messiah is pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. You also have, by the way, an immense, daily system of sacrifices in the Old Testament to tell you that sins get taken away when blameless blood is shed.

Now, it's absolutely true that the Lord does all sorts of powerful things with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. But that isn't how He has chosen to save sinners. He saves not by power, but by love – by sacrificial love. He doesn't vanquish sinners, but dwells among them. He doesn't offer salvation if they make themselves holy, but takes their unholiness upon Himself. He doesn't make them suffer His wrath and shed their blood for their sin; but takes all of their sins upon Himself, suffers the condemnation, bleeds and dies in their place.

He doesn't defeat sin as the unbeatable king, but as the humble, suffering servant, even to death on the cross.

That's the part that Peter doesn't get. It's all there in the Old Testament, plain as day, but he only latches onto the powerful parts and skips the part about the Messiah's sacrificial death. He's not the only one: there's a popular idea among his fellow citizens that the Messiah will come and lead a revolution against Caesar and throw the Romans out of the country. Similar things have happened: less than two hundred years before, Judas Maccabeus led the revolt against the "Greek" Seleucids and drove them out of the land. (It's why Judas is such a popular name in the 1st century. Not so much anymore.)

You can understand Peter's reaction. For one thing, he cares about Jesus and doesn't want anything bad to happen to Him. But far more importantly, Peter's appalled that the Son of the living God would say He's going to suffer and die. What kind of God suffers and dies?

You can also understand Jesus' rebuke, "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." At this moment, Peter and Satan are of the same mind: they don't want Jesus to die for the sins of the world. They don't want Jesus to redeem you. When Peter rebukes Jesus, he and the devil are on the same page.

It's easier to do than you think. There are plenty of times that you'd rather Jesus act more like Superman and less like a servant. You wouldn't mind at all if being a Christian meant always being healthy and wealthy, rather than trusting despite loss and trial. You'd like to see some glory now, not trust in the cross and hope for heaven. It would be easier to tell others about Jesus if He vanquished His enemies and rewarded His friends right here and right now,

instead of telling you to love your enemies and endure suffering. You'd like it better if life were about laughing in the face of temptation rather than repenting of your sins. You'd prefer Him to wipe covid-19 off the map, rather than assure you that He works through the suffering and uncertainty for your good. You'd like a bulletproof Savior who makes *you* bulletproof, mistake-free and happy about who you are; rather than the One who promises that His grace is sufficient for you, and His power is made perfect in weakness. Because you'd rather Jesus did things differently, you're apt to resent Him when He does things according to His plan.

Peter didn't like the idea of Jesus as the suffering Savior who rises from the dead, and that put him on the same page as Satan. Even if you're okay with a suffering Savior, you really don't want to be the suffering saint for the rest of your life. You'd rather follow in the footsteps of Jesus without any of that: you'd rather do things your way, get your own way and have Him tidy up things after you. When you oppose Jesus' Word and will, be ready to hear Him say to you, "Get behind Me, Satan," because it is then that you clearly have in mind the things of man – your own things, not the things of God.

Please note, though: when Jesus speaks to Satan, He says, "Be gone" (Matt 4:10); but when He speaks to Peter, He says, "Get behind Me." And what is Peter supposed to do when he gets behind Jesus? What are you supposed to do when you get behind Jesus? Once you're there, you're perfectly positioned to follow Him. That's why Jesus next says, "If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me." To follow Him is to deny what you want, and to submit to the will of Jesus – even if it means the cross. It's to pray as Jesus prayed, "Thy will be done." It's to trust in His promises in spite of what you see, because His promises are more sure and eternal than what you see.

If that trusting sounds difficult, let me assure you that it's impossible by your own reason or strength. There's a better reason to follow Jesus: He who died for your sins did indeed rise again on the third day. He leads you beside still waters, adds His Word and makes you a new creation. He prepares a banquet for you, and so you receive His body and blood for forgiveness, life and salvation. As He bids you to follow in His Word, He enlivens you to follow as He speaks your sins away, strengthens your faith and sets you free to serve.

Despite your penchant to want things your way, He doesn't tell you to be gone. He bids you to rejoin the flock as one forgiven, to follow Him in life, in death and in resurrection; because, by His grace, you will dwell in His house forever. In Him you have salvation: that's what Jesus does.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen