

## The Seventeenth Sunday of Pentecost

September 20, 2015

**Prayer of the Day:** Lord, we pray that your mercy and grace may always before and follow after us that, loving you with undivided hearts, we may be ready for every good and useful work; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Verse of the Day:** Alleluia! Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. Alleluia! (Romans 15:4)

**Sermon Text:** Mark 8:27-38

Our sermon reading comes from Mark 8:27-35.

**27 Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"**

**28 They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."**

**29 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"**

**Peter answered, "You are the Christ."**

**30 Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.**

**31 He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. 32 He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.**

**33 But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."**

### Mark 8:27-35

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<sup>33</sup> But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

<sup>34</sup> Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.

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Why is Peter upset with Jesus? You see him rebuke Jesus; he strongly disapproves what Jesus is saying. Yet, why? What is it that troubles Peter so much about Jesus' upcoming suffering and death that causes him to suddenly lash out?

I mean, at first, our reading sounds so pleasant. Jesus is walking with his disciples—something he does often, something not really out of the ordinary. As he walks, he asks: **“Who do people say I am?”**

The question is easy to answer. You could probably come up with a quick list of things people say about Jesus. Your co-worker might not call him “John the Baptist,” but they might say that Jesus’ preaching about repentance is more fiery than other preachers of his day. I am pretty sure that you will not hear people today call him “Elijah.” Yet, some might say that Jesus was a radical preacher who was not afraid to challenge traditional preaching. Most today still consider Jesus a great prophet. That he is not God’s Son, he is not the Savior of the world, but he was a great inspirational leader who inspires you to be nice and loving and follow his example of being a morally good person. Those answers you hear today are the same answers the disciples list off.

Yet, Jesus very quickly zeroes in on your heart: **“[W]hat about you? [...] Who do you say I am?”** You know the Holy Scriptures; you know that Jesus is someone greater than an earthly leader or a great prophet. You believe that **[He is] the Christ.** With that one little word: “Christ,” every Old Testament prophecy comes pouring onto this Jesus. His mother is a virgin, just like Isaiah prophesied ([7:14](#)). His little hometown is Bethlehem Ephrathah ([Micah 5:2](#)). He is the long-promised Prophet ([Deuteronomy 18:15](#)). All of these promises to take on flesh—and here they are, fulfilled, completed in Jesus.

Peter knows that. He knows that the Jewish nation has been waiting for this Jesus. People stop what they are doing to come hear Jesus preach. Not just that, but these people adore him so much that they are willing to crown him king! Just think about that. The Romans rule your government, forcing you to pay steep taxes which go to their capital city of Rome—not to your own country. You had laws which you followed; laws which gave you a sense of security and freedom. Now you have to submit to a Roman emperor you never saw. Rome can summon an army to imprison you, beat you, kill you if they think you are protesting. If only Jesus would be a king—and not just any king, but *God’s* promised king—then who could stand in the way of Israel becoming their own independent nation again?

You can just see those pleasant thoughts racing through Peter’s mind. So, when Jesus **began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again [...] why would Peter not take him aside and begin to rebuke him[?]**

After all, is that not why Peter is upset? He believes Jesus is to drive out the Roman army. Instead, Jesus stands there, saying that he is supposed to die and his own

countrymen are going to do the killing. If only Peter can talk Jesus out of death, then maybe Peter can be celebrated as the one who helped bring fame to Israel!

As odd as Peter's thinking sounds here, are we really all that different? Of course, we live on the other side of Good Friday and we thank Jesus for dying on the cross to save us from all of our sins. Yet, Jesus still rules us by his Word, does he not? Is it always so easy to follow everything Jesus says? Our God gives blessings of children and intimacy for marriage, but is it easy to tell that to a world constantly erasing marriage? Is it always easy to tell your friend or neighbor or doctor that you trust God to protect you—or is there some shame in saying that? Is it tempting to focus more on growing our church, to filling our pews, to making sure the community thinks we are among the biggest and best—and that the only way to do this is to stop talking so much about what God says?

Are we really all that different from Peter? After all, what is at the heart of Peter's rebuke? That he makes sure that Jesus does not upset the world, that Jesus does what the world wants and becomes king. What causes personal tension between the things of this world and the things of God? On the one hand we love our God and his Word, but on the other hand, we may want to make sure the world does not get angry at us, laugh at us, insult us, ruin our reputation or damage our egocentric pride.

The problem is, those two things will never go together. The things of this world is simply to fall in love with this world. The things of God are to love him with all of our heart, mind, and soul. You know, the devil would love nothing more than to take us to the top of the temple, show us all the kingdoms and riches and power and fame of the world and say: "This is all yours only if you bow down and worship me!"

That is the great divide we face as Christians. We only can love one master. Even Jesus reminds us of that: **he rebuke[s] Peter, [saying] "Get behind me, Satan! [...] You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."** Your Jesus reminds you that he is the "Christ," the Promised One of God, who comes to earth not to satisfy what we want him to do, but he comes to earth to do what his Father wants to do.

Jesus does not come for glory and honor and power—yes, the devil offers him those worldly things ([Matthew 4:9-10](#)). Yet, he comes for something far greater, something that will benefit you far more. He comes to keep, follow, and obey these things of God.

When Jesus first rebukes Peter, he is about two weeks from Calvary. He turns his face to the cross, knowing what is coming. He knows how this nation of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will treat him. They own this promise of a Savior. God he sent prophet after prophet to point this nation forward to the forgiveness of sins. Yet, they absolutely reject this promise to the point of nailing Jesus to a cross. Remember, death on a cross is a statement. It reminds everyone walking by that this was a bad man. It scares off anyone from following such a person—lest they too be nailed to another cross. Death on a cross is humiliatingly shameful.

Yet, on the cross Jesus endures something far greater, far worse than human shame: Jesus endures the wrath of God. God the Father turns his back on his only Son because he carries our sins. Jesus cries out, pleading that his Father just listen to his voice, only to be met with complete silence. Jesus gives up everything so that you can have everything.

Did you catch that in our reading? Jesus **began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.** We can easily fall in love with what the world considers important, what the world calls “successful” and “famous.” Yet, only Jesus tells us what is truly “successful.” Yes, he would suffer at the hands of the leaders. Yes, he would die. Yes, by all means of the word, his life would not be pleasant. Yet, how does it all turn out? He rises again. He does not rise so that he can go to heaven alone. He rises again so that you can go to heaven.

That is the glistening jewel of the cross. It hangs there, high on our wall to remind you that Jesus saved you by his death on the cross. That Roman-Empire-object-of-torture has now transformed into a symbol of victory. Because Jesus suffers and dies you have eternal life!

That is how Christ connects to you through the cross. Yet, that cross does something else—it connects you to Christ. No, people will probably not march into your house, arrest you, take you out to some field, tie your hands and feet to a cross, and then stick that cross in the ground until you die. However, sometimes you might feel as if you are suffering on a cross.

What does it that mean, to “take up our cross?” You probably have heard it said before, have you not? Maybe your friend was struggling with their health or with a family member and told you, “Well, it is my cross to bear in life.” You just sang an opening hymn titled: *Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken*. If anything, Jesus says to you: “Take up your cross and follow me.” What does that really mean—to bear, to take up our cross? Well, crosses are objects of pain and suffering. Jesus painfully suffers because he does not turn away from God’s Word.

Because you hold to God’s Word, you might suffer. The cross that you bear in life is any and all suffering that you might face because you belong to Christ. It means that you will stand out in this world. It means that people might make fun of you because you hold to the Bible’s teachings of marriage instead of what the world continually defines marriage as. Yes, people will pressure you to condone false teachings—and you will feel that pull to want to side with the world instead of the things of God. You will face this constant tug of war to embrace the things of the world at the expense of following the things of God.

Remember this: when the cross presses into you, look to the cross of triumph. When you feel like life would just be easier by not listening to Jesus, look to the cross, see that Jesus saves you by the cross. Like you, he suffered because he would not change the Word. Yet, he rose again and lives in heaven! Like you, he is insulted, even called a spawn of Satan, in order to shame him into silence ([Mark 3:22](#)). Yet, he lives eternally, ruling forever with that same Word!

Yes, the cross is an object of pain, but it is also an object of eternal peace. Because of that cross, you are forgiven. Because of that cross, Christ connects to you. Because of that cross, you remain connected to Christ. Yes, gladly take up that cross, knowing that you do not carry it alone. Take up the cross because you follow in the steps of Jesus. Take up that cross because that cross connects you to your heavenly home. Take up that cross because **CHRIST’S CROSS CONNECTS YOU TO CHRIST!**