

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, August 30

Text: Matthew 16:21-28 and Romans 12:9-21

“We are called to the cruciform life”

Intro: Read Book of James 5:13-17 “Are any among you suffering?”

It is in times like these that we must rely on God's Word more than ever. In times of a global pandemic... of raging tropical storms... wildfires in California... and of violence in our streets, we pray come Holy Spirit Come... Come and fill our hearts with your peace.

We all know what happened in Kenosha, Wisconsin. People are angry. People want to assign blame. People are suffering.

Our lessons this week remind us that God does not leave us when we suffer, and that the followers Jesus to are called to live differently than the rest of the world. We are called to the cruciform life.

First in Our Gospel from Matthew 16, just after Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah and Jesus gives him the nickname “Rock”, Jesus is now calling Peter a stumbling block. How quickly the tables turn? After Peter correctly identifies Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus teaches a few verses later what this means. His messiahship will involve great suffering in Jerusalem at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and that God's plan for Jesus will include death and resurrection.

This was not in Peter's framework of what the Messiah should be. He didn't have room for Jesus to suffer and die. How far off is Peter from us? I have sat in many hospital rooms, nursing homes, and family homes with people who nearing the end of life. Many of them are ready to go, but their family isn't ready to let them go. People do not like to discuss death and dying. We don't want to see our loved ones suffer or leave us behind.

Jesus calls Peter a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things, but on human things.” Here Peter is acting like a tempter or tester to Jesus, much like Satan. Peter doesn't believe the divine should suffer. But Jesus, by saying get behind me Satan, means take your proper place behind me. Get out

of my way. If you want to be my follower, take up your cross and follow me.

This part of the scripture convicts me, because we often think first of human things. Our minds are often dominated by our human worries and concerns and not on divine things. We often don't deny ourselves. We think of ourselves first.

A stumbling block was a rock along a path that one stumbles against. The Greek word for stumbling block is the word "scandalon." 1st Corinthians 1:23 uses the same word to describe how people viewed the cross of Jesus. Paul said, "But we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles." But that is where the power of God resides... in weakness associated with the cross.

We worship a God who intimately knows suffering on the cross and understands our suffering. The times when you feel abandoned by God, or when you suffer, or when you can't feel God's presence... know that God is with us. And God didn't stop there. Resurrection came. Easter tells us there is always new life around the corner.

Knowing that we are a death and resurrection people, the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans tells the Christians how to live this out. Paul says, everything we do should be done with genuine love. The love God has for us. We are to rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, and persevere in prayer. We are to contribute to the needs of the saints (those within the church) and extend hospitality to strangers (those outside the church). We are to live in harmony with one another and associate with the lowly. We aren't to think more highly of ourselves than we ought. We should not repay evil for evil or avenge ourselves. We should not repay violence with violence. Instead if your enemies are hungry, you should feed them, if they are thirsty you should give them something to drink, for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Pick any one of those commands of Paul and meditate on it this week. They call for a new way of handling violence, they call for creative resistance, welcoming strangers, and dealing with evil.

May the cruciform life of Jesus guide our lives as his followers.
Know that being a Christian will at times lead to suffering on behalf
of others... but that God journeys with us in our suffering. Amen.