



## Sermon for the Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Aug. 2020

### Peter -- Rock and Stumbling Block?

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene The Rev. Glenda Empsall

[Exodus 3:1-15](#), [Psalm 105:1-6, 23-26, 45c](#), [Romans 12:9-21](#), [Matthew 16:21-28](#)

O God, help us to lean not on our own understanding but in everything acknowledge you and direct our words, thoughts and actions in Jesus' name. Amen.

There is much to ponder in the 8 verses of today's Gospel reading. This lesson marks a transition from Jesus' healing, teaching and preaching to the public, to Jesus doing his best to explain to the disciples what is going to happen – happen to him, “he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”

Being human, the disciples, especially Peter, focused so much on the “great suffering” and “be killed” part that they missed the next bit, “and on the third day be raised.” How would you feel if your mentor, your friend, prophesied Messiah, told you he would suffer and die? You might shout, “NO!” at the top of your lungs. “Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked him, “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.” Peter as mother hen. Peter unable to imagine suffering and death for the Savior of the World. Peter already in denial.

In last week's Gospel lesson, when Jesus asked, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter had the right answer, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus said to Peter, “...on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven...” Last week, Jesus called Peter his crucial building block, his cornerstone. Last week, Jesus promised Peter the keys to heaven's gates.

This week, Jesus said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me.” That Peter was both a building block and a stumbling block, may be a hopeful note for you and me when we struggle to do and say the right things, but “err and stray ... like lost sheep.” We do not always see the big picture and many things are beyond our understanding. Maybe we just don't want to know. Peter encouraged Jesus to change his course, but Jesus did not stumble. Jesus was resolute. Jesus seemed to tell Peter that, in the greater scheme of things, suffering is not the worst that could happen. Dying is not the worst that could happen. “Great peace have those who love God's law; nothing can make them stumble.” [Psalm 119:165]

Jesus accused Peter of setting his mind “...not on divine things but on human things.” The Old Testament Prophets give us insights into the differences; “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” [Isaiah 55:8-9] “He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” [Micah 6:8]

Jesus said, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me." We know that Jesus carried a physical cross. The violence Jesus experienced was "at the hands" of real people; up close and personal. "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?" There are many things to which one can "die" – addictions, anger, fear, greed, hate, sin... "dying" to an old way of life. How will we live? What crosses will we bear? Do we take up crosses that have nothing to do with following Jesus? What sacrifices are we willing to make to be better followers of Jesus? Will we seek moral high ground or cede to injustice or legal technicalities? Or, to change metaphors, in what ditch would you be willing to die?

The disciples clung to the image of a warrior Messiah, coming with great power to restore The Kingdom of Israel to its former magnificence. Jesus' next words seem to encourage their belief, "For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father ... Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

In the next verses in Matthew, [17:1-13] we learn who lived to see Jesus' glory before they died to this life. "Six days later," Jesus took Peter, James and John to the mountain top where they saw Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah and Jesus was transfigured, "...his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white... While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" We remember a similar heavenly proclamation after Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist.

Coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead." The disciples asked, "Why, then, do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" He replied, "... Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but they did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man is about to suffer at their hands." Then the disciples understood that Jesus was speaking to them about John the Baptist."

It is in Baptism that Christians are cleansed from sin and born again in the risen life of Jesus; born to new life: We thank you, Almighty God, for the gift of water. Over it the Holy Spirit moved in the beginning of creation. Through it you led the children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt into the land of promise. In it your Son Jesus received the baptism of John and was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah, the Christ, to lead us, through his death and resurrection, from the bondage of sin into everlasting life. We thank you, Father, for the water of Baptism. In it we are buried with Christ in his death. By it we share in his resurrection. Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit. Therefore in joyful obedience to your Son, we bring into his fellowship those who come to him in faith, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. [BCP pg. 306] This is the essence of the faith we claim.

In the Way of Love; Turn, Learn, Pray, Worship, Bless, Go, and Rest. Amen.