

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

August 30, 2020

Psalm 26:1-12 (NIV) ¹Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have led a blameless life; I have trusted in the LORD without wavering. ²Test me, O LORD, and try me, examine my heart and my mind; ³for your love is ever before me, and I walk continually in your truth. ⁴I do not sit with deceitful men, nor do I consort with hypocrites; ⁵I abhor the assembly of evildoers and refuse to sit with the wicked. ⁶I wash my hands in innocence, and go about your altar, O LORD, ⁷proclaiming aloud your praise and telling of all your wonderful deeds. ⁸I love the house where you live, O LORD, the place where your glory dwells. ⁹Do not take away my soul along with sinners, my life with bloodthirsty men, ¹⁰in whose hands are wicked schemes, whose right hands are full of bribes. ¹¹But I lead a blameless life; redeem me and be merciful to me. ¹²My feet stand on level ground; in the great assembly I will praise the LORD.

Jeremiah 15:15-21 (NIV) ¹⁵You understand, O LORD; remember me and care for me. Avenge me on my persecutors. You are long-suffering—do not take me away; think of how I suffer reproach for your sake. ¹⁶When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O LORD God Almighty. ¹⁷I never sat in the company of revelers, never made merry with them; I sat alone because your hand was on me and you had filled me with indignation. ¹⁸Why is my pain unending and my wound grievous and incurable? Will you be to me like a deceptive brook, like a spring that fails? ¹⁹Therefore this is what the LORD says: "If you repent, I will restore you that you may serve me; if you utter worthy, not worthless, words, you will be my spokesman. Let this people turn to you, but you must not turn to them. ²⁰I will make you a wall to this people, a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you to rescue and save you," declares the LORD. ²¹"I will save you

from the hands of the wicked and redeem you from the grasp of the cruel."

Romans 12:9-21 (NIV) ⁹Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. ¹¹Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. ¹²Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. ¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. ¹⁷Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. ¹⁸If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. ²⁰On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Matthew 16:21-28 (NIV) ²¹From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. ²²Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" ²³Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." ²⁴Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. ²⁶What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his

soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?
27For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. 28I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

The Cost of the Kingdom—Outline

Matthew 16:21-28

❑ **From the great confession to great confusion**

(verses 21-23)

- **The suffering Messiah** (verse 21)
- **The Rock becomes a stumbling block** (verses 22-23; Daniel 7:14)
- **The things of God and the things of men** (verse 23; Isaiah 55:8-9; Colossians 3:2; Romans 8:5-8)

➤ **The cost of following Jesus** (verses 24-27)

- **The cost of denying self** (verse 24; 2 Corinthians 5:15, 17)
- **The cost of the cross** (verse 24; Galatians 2:20)
- **The cost of losing one's life** (verses 25-26)
- **The cost of glory** (verse 27; Hebrews 2:9; 1 Peter 1:10-11)

➤ **Thy kingdom come!** (verse 28)

Benediction: Hebrews 13:20-21

The Cost of the Kingdom

Matthew 16:21-28

How valuable is a life? What is the price you would pay? That is essentially the question Jesus puts to his disciples in today's gospel text.

And it is the question Jesus asks of each of us:

What will a person give in exchange for his life?

I suppose one measure of that cost is the price that would be paid for a ransom. A number of high dollar ransoms have been disbursed over the years to gangsters, drug lords and terrorists in exchange for a life.

One of the greatest ransoms ever paid was for King Richard, the Lionhearted in the year 1093.

He was sailing back from the Third Crusade in the Holy Lands when a shipwreck forced him into unfriendly territory and was captured by Duke Leopold V, of Austria.

The Duke, who had been humiliated by King Richard early in the Crusade, and wanted revenge, imprisoned him for more than a year. Finally, a ransom of 150,000 silver marks was negotiated—reportedly 2-3 times the annual royal revenue of England at that time—and estimated to be worth \$3.3 billion today.

What is the price you will give in return for your life?

Would you exchange it for a king's ransom? Tragically, most lose their souls for a price far, far more trivial.

What is the cost of following Jesus?

In this series of messages on ***The Good News of the Kingdom***, we have already touched upon that cost in Matthew Chapter 10—where we learned that following Jesus may cost you relationships with family and friends, and that you may pay the price of persecution and even death.

In today's gospel we see the **cost** Jesus himself was willing to pay (and did pay), and what the cost would be for the disciples to follow Him.

So, I have titled this message, *The Cost of the Kingdom*.

As I said last week, Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ—the Messiah—is the turning point, the fulcrum, as it were, of the Gospel of Matthew.

Now that Jesus has confirmed to His disciples that He is indeed the Messiah, the Son of Man depicted in Daniel 7, *from that time on* Jesus would teach those disciples what the true role of the Son of Man—the Messiah—must be.

But in doing so Jesus triggers Peter so that he descends

From the great confession to great confusion

²¹From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. ²²Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" ²³Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

➤ **The suffering Messiah**

²¹From that time on . . . (from that moment forward)

This marks the beginning of Jesus' journey to the cross.

²¹ From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

This was completely incomprehensible to the disciples. They were expecting a conquering king, not a suffering and rejected and dying one.

Note that Jesus does not give a reason *why* He would be rejected and killed.

We know it was to redeem sinful humanity; *we* know that it was the cost of our forgiveness; *we* know that the cross and resurrection was the victory, not only over sin, but over the devil and death itself! *We* know that by the cross and resurrection Jesus inaugurated His kingdom on earth—the kingdom of grace, which we enter by faith in a risen Lord.

But the disciples were, at this time, in the dark about any of that. Jesus had not yet revealed that to them.

It was as if a lightning bolt streaked out of a clear blue sky and vaporized everything they had ever hoped for or dreamed of.

Jesus didn't even say it would be a cross on which he died—perhaps that would have been too much for them to take all at once—but Jesus did go on to say that they must take up their cross to follow Him.

In response to this revelation by Jesus, we are told

➤ **The Rock becomes a stumbling block**

²²Peter [remember his name means Rock] took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"

It is hard to image how shocking and scandalous this was. For a disciple to rebuke a rabbi was unthinkable. What would lead Peter to contradict and correct Jesus?

Some think it was just a protective impulse, like when Peter vainly drew a sword at Jesus' arrest and hacked off an ear in the garden of Gethsemane!

I'm sure Peter believed he was on solid Scriptural ground since, as we heard last week, Jesus had just identified himself with the Messianic Son of Man from the vision recorded in Daniel chapter 7 of whom it was written:

14Then to [the Son of Man] was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed.

Peter, along with every Israelite at that time, was expecting the Messiah to establish God's kingdom here and now. They were not looking for a suffering Messiah who would be rejected and killed!

Peter was absolutely convinced that this was the way it was supposed to be!

Jesus' reprimand was swift and sharp:

23Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

Peter was doing the work of Satan, trying to dissuade Jesus from the path of suffering. That was, in essence, the temptation the devil had made when he promised Jesus *all the kingdoms of the earth* if he would *bow down and worship* this enemy of God. Jesus calls Peter a stumbling block—a trap and a temptation.

The proper place for a disciple was behind his rabbi, and disciples would literally do that, and walk behind their esteemed teachers. Jesus is saying—get back in line—you're the student here, not the teacher!

If you won't follow, then get out of the way!

Jesus then makes the distinction between

➤ **The things of God and the things of men**

The Bible often contrasts God's ways with our human ways.

Isaiah 55:8-9 says: *8For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. 9For as the heavens are higher than the*

earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. (ESV)

Colossians 3:2 instructs us to: *Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. (NIV)*

Romans 8:5-8 informs us: *5For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. 6For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. 7For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. 8Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (ESV)*

Peter did not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.

Next our gospel text then turns to

The cost of following Jesus

24Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. 26What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? 27For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.

First, there is

➤ **The cost of denying self**

24Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself . . ."

To deny oneself is not the same as self-denial.

Self-denial is a form of personal discipline. It is giving up chocolate for lent, or ice cream and cake because of your diet, or smoking because of high blood pressure.

But denying one's self means much, much more.

The word in the original Greek language in which the New Testament was written meant: To cut someone completely off, to refuse any association and companionship with him, to completely disown.

That was, in fact, exactly what Peter did to Jesus! The same Peter, who was given the great insight by God that Jesus was the Messiah, denied Him the night before Jesus was crucified. "I don't know the man!" Peter had said emphatically.

We should be that emphatic about disowning our sinful self. We are to forsake our former life, our life without Jesus Christ, when we lived just for ourselves. We are to make a radical departure from that life and follow Jesus.

That means getting your eyes off ourselves . . . our problems, our desires, our ambitions . . . and set our eyes on Jesus Christ.

To deny oneself is to stop being absorbed with oneself and to make Jesus Christ the center of your life.

Denying ourselves does not mean to give up only a portion of our life, some special habit or desire, or some outward practice. It is to disown our old self altogether; the natural, sinful self as it centers in the things of men and has no use for the things of God.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: Denying ourselves "can only mean knowing Christ and ceasing to know ourselves, seeing only Him, and not the road which is too hard for us."

This is nothing but a true conversion, the very first essential of the Christian life. Self is therefore evicted and Jesus enters into our life; so that from now on we live, not for ourselves but for Jesus Christ who died for us.

2 Corinthians 5:15 tells us, *and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.*

And 2 Corinthians 5:17 proclaims: *Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.*

Then there is

➤ **The cost of the cross**

and take up his cross and follow me.

Bonhoeffer again wrote: "Only when we have become completely oblivious of self are we ready to bear the cross for His sake. If in the end we know only [Jesus], if we have ceased to notice the pain of our own cross, we are indeed looking only unto Him." He goes on to say in this way Jesus "has enabled us to receive even a word as hard as this as a word of grace. It comes to us in the joy of discipleship and gives us strength to persevere."

The Greek language here is clear: The act of denying ourselves and taking our cross, are completed action, they are past decisions. The act of following Jesus is a long and continuous course of action.

We can then say with the Apostle Paul: *I have been crucified with Christ and **I no longer live**, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* (Galatians 2:20 NIV)

There is also,

➤ **The cost of losing one's life**

²⁵For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. ²⁶What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?

Denying ourselves, losing our lives . . . may sound like our lives are not valuable in and of themselves. But Jesus does not say these things to denigrate the value of our lives, but to show the how infinitely valuable we are to Him—so valuable that he would suffer and die to redeem us!

Jesus is not asking of us something that He has not already modeled. For our sake Jesus endured losing His life, in order that we might find life in Him.

Jesus' warning of losing one's soul talk is not idle talk. There will be a time when *the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory*, but this will be for judgment.

Finally, there is

➤ **The cost of glory**

*27For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's **glory** with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.*

For Jesus to come in glory, he first had to suffer. Hebrews 2:9 makes that very clear: *But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with **glory** and honor because he suffered death, so that by the **grace** of God he might taste death for everyone.* (NIV)

All this Jesus did for our salvation

1 Peter 1:10-11 reveals to us that, ¹⁰*Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, ¹¹trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the **sufferings** of Christ and the **glories** that would follow.* (NIV)

In closing, remember that Jesus taught us to pray,

Thy kingdom come!

28I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

We must remember that the kingdom of *the Son of Man* is not a place, but is the royal rule of the Messiah.

Our catechism teaches us that “the Kingdom of God is the kingdom of grace in which God rules in the hearts and lives of believers and which one day will become the kingdom of glory in heaven where those who are saved are with Christ in perfect happiness forever.”

It was through the cross that Jesus would become King—the King of love—the one who rules with gentleness and compassion; the one who extends pardon, mercy and grace.

Jesus calls us to follow him—follow him to the cross, and beyond to a new life through the resurrection. It was Dietrich Bonhoeffer who said, “when Jesus calls a man, He bids him, ‘come and die.’”

Jesus plainly said that the path to faithful and fruitful following begins with death. A death to self and self-centered ambition; giving up our own cherished dreams, desires and expectations. The reward of “losing your life,” Jesus said, is gaining *eternal life*.

In his classic book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer compares what he calls “cheap grace” to “costly grace.”

“Such grace is *costly* because it calls us to follow, and it is *grace* because it calls us to follow *Jesus Christ*. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is *costly*, because it cost God the life of His Son: “You were bought with a price,” and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is *grace* because God did not reckon His son too

dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered Him up for us.” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* p. 39.)

Let us pray . . .

Benediction: Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

(Hebrews 13:20-21 NASB)