

The Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 17, 2017
St. Matthew 16:21-26
No Other Way to Life Except Via the Cross
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Dear Friends in Christ Jesus,

Have you ever thought to yourself, "There has got to be another way!" Weren't you really thinking, "There has got to be an easier way!" To snatch your body and soul from sin and hell Jesus chose a hard and hurtful path. Jesus walked the path to Calvary's cross. In the weakness of his true human nature, the Savior asked his Father if there might be another path that excluded drinking the cup of suffering. When the Father said, "No, there is no easier way," Jesus was willing.

Jesus explained to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem for that Passion. Peter was not willing that his Teacher and Lord would have to suffer and die. The impetuous apostle did not ask Jesus if there were another way, he just flatly declared this could not be the way. Oh, but it would happen to Jesus. For our redemption and eternal salvation there is **No Other Way to Life Except Via the Cross**. Jesus had to walk that path. Jesus' disciples have to walk that path.

St. Matthew sounded a prelude to the seriousness of what Jesus had to tell his disciples. "From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things...and that he must be killed." There was no other way. Soon the Son of God and Son of Man who had been perfectly obedient to the law would offer up his righteousness on the cross as payment to give us new life. Jesus became a curse for us on a tree to overcome Satan who by a tree had overcome us.

God's Son offered up a perfect prayer of trust in Gethsemane, "Yet not my will but yours be done." If the cross was the only place to bear our every slanderous word, every lustful thought, ever hurtful action, then let it be that way. Our debt was so great the payment had to be so great. Jesus had to walk that path. He would walk it willingly, he told his disciples.

This was unwelcome news to Peter who had correctly confessed his faith to Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Surely, Satan had put into the disciple's head, the way of the cross was not fitting and proper for the Messiah. "Never Lord!" Peter said, "This shall never happen to you." Jesus knew where this false argument, this lie, had come from. "Go behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

Satan used Peter's zeal for Christ without his right knowledge of Christ as a temptation to get Jesus to take another way, an easy way, a cross less way as our Savior. A way apart from God's will, an easy way, a way without suffering is not God's way but the way men do things. Without the cross there would be no redemption or reconciliation. Without the curse of the cross there would be no removal of guilt. Jesus' cross is the place of exchange- Christ's righteousness for my sin. Christ's death for my death. His righteousness and death would lead to his resurrection and my new life.

Jesus reminded his disciples that the cross was not the entire picture. "And on the third day be raised to life." There was no other way to life except via the cross. Jesus had to walk that path. The Father would raise his Son from death in triumph over our enemies-sin, death, and hell. Jesus finished for us the goal of our faith, the salvation of our souls. On the way to that goal, Jesus' disciples have to walk that path-the path of the cross.

Our cross is not a redeeming cross like Jesus' cross. Our cross is a consequent cross. It comes as a consequence of following Christ. It is a necessary cross as it marks us as Jesus' disciples. While our cross is heavy and painful, Jesus reminds us in another place that our yoke is easy and our burden light because Jesus gives us the Sabbath rest of his grace as our strength.

Martin Luther describes in the Large Catechism what Jesus means by the cross we must bear as we walk the path of discipleship behind our Savior. "And let no one think that we will have peace; rather,

we must sacrifice all we have on earth—possessions, honor, house and farm, spouse and children, body and life. Now, that grieves our flesh and the old creature, for it means we must remain steadfast, suffer patiently whatever befalls us, and let go of whatever is taken from us."

Some of those crosses will come because of our faithfulness to God's Word. Some crosses will come because we will not join in the wicked thoughts and actions of the world. Some crosses will come because we our bodies and lives still must for a time bear the pain and deterioration that come from being fallen souls in a fallen world. In all of these circumstances, the disciple must deny himself.

Who wants to act in an unselfish manner? Who wants to forsake everything in this world to gain the eternal? My new man created in the image of God wants to do that. He is constantly waging war against my Old Adam that does not want to deny self. There is no advantage in gaining the whole world and losing my soul. As a disciple of Christ you know this. Jesus' words to you ring true. So, as we heard Paul in our second lesson, "In view of God's mercy, offer yourselves as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship."

One aspect of our true and proper worship is bearing our crosses. It is not the Christian's way to seek the easy way, the comfortable way following Christ. In fact, no such ways of following Christ exist. If I want to save my life for this world, that is, continue in my sin without repentance and faith in Christ, I will lose my soul in hell. If I lose my life now in repentance and faith, that is, give up sin for godliness as a fruit of faith, I will save my life for eternity in heaven. To save or lose my life does not mean only at death. It means now as a walk daily in this life.

If someone tells us we don't have to suffer and bear our crosses in this life, we say to them, "Go behind us, Satan. You do not have in mind the things of God but the things of men. I am Jesus' disciple and I must walk that path because I am following him. And if that path leads to death, God will raise me to life. There is no other way and I am joyful to walk it as was my Savior, Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the living God." Amen. <SDG>