

Matthew 16:13-20  
St Mark – September 3, 2023  
The Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
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#### Matthew 16:21-28

Jesus began to show his disciples that 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. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.” But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

Then Jesus told his disciples, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 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?

“For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. 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.”

#### **Listen to the whole story**

Today’s gospel story is telling us to listen to all of what Jesus tells us and it plants the seed of a question. In the middle of this teaching he refers to, “three days”. He tells his disciples that he will be killed and he goes on to say that on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day he will rise from the grave.

So what happened during the time that he was in the grave? What did he do?

In our gospel reading this morning we hear Peter missing the opportunity to ask that obvious question and missing the richness what Jesus is saying. We hear Peter missing almost all of what Jesus is telling them.

Peter is stuck on the horror of just a part of Jesus' message. Peter only hears that Jesus will experience great suffering and then be killed and Peter objects. Jesus rejects Peter's interference and rebukes Peter when it is clear that he is not listening to all that Jesus is telling them.

Jesus' message this morning ends with hope. Hope that rests in the love and power of The Christ.

His ministry is turning toward Jerusalem and the suffering that is ahead. His ministry is turning toward Jerusalem and the Glory that is to be his, the triumph that assures our salvation.

Peter hears Jesus speak of his coming torture and death after being rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes. All the disciples would be especially shocked by this. They were raised believing that these were the best of the Jewish people and now Jesus is revealing that these are the very people who will torment him and bring about his death.

Maybe this is why Peter misses the message of glory and salvation that Jesus tells of here. Maybe this is why Peter doesn't ask the obvious question, "what will happen when you are in the grave for those days before you resurrect?"

Peter is stuck on the part about Jesus being killed instead of hanging on every word that Jesus says. We get stuck sometimes too.

When we focus only on being sinners it is easy to lose sight of God's love for us. We can easily feel unworthy. When we focus only on being God's beloved creation we can easily look past the pain of others and care only for our own needs and desires.

We grow in Christ when we hang on his every word, not just those that are read to us on Sunday mornings.

When Peter fails to listen to all of what Jesus is saying, Jesus calls Peter Satan and tells him that he is a stumbling block. Jesus reminds him to set his mind on things of the Spirit, the divine, instead of those that are of the world.

Peter has lost his way. He isn't embracing all of what Jesus is teaching. Just as we often fail to do.

He doesn't seem to even hear the words when Jesus tells them that after three days he will rise again. This is the *divine* Jesus is talking about. He will not only be brought back to life after being murdered, but he will conquer death, resurrect, and rise to life eternal. Joined with The Father and The Holy Spirit in the Glory of God.

So what is the answer to that obvious question? What happened during the time that Jesus was in the grave? The commentators are uncharacteristically quite on this question. I don't think we can know for sure, at least not in this life, but I'm most drawn to a possibility and that is all it is, a possibility.

Peter writes in his first letter (1 Peter 4:6) that Jesus preached to the dead and that,

“...though judged in the flesh like men, they might live in the spirit like God.”

As we read the words of the Apostles' Creed we say that Jesus “descended to the dead”. While the Apostles' Creed was not written by the Apostles, it was meant to affirm the Apostles' teaching. It is the earliest of our creeds and is thought to have started taking form in the second century after the birth of Jesus.

When the creed affirms that Jesus “descended to the dead,” before he rose again on the third day it seems reasonable to believe that when he descended he descended as The Messiah, as The Savior.

I wonder about the possibility that Jesus offered his saving grace to all of those souls too. I believe that Jesus has been and is everywhere.

When I mourn the death of an *unbeliever* I'm reminded that Jesus is everywhere, offering his saving Grace to every soul. I'm reminded that God alone knows the heart of each of us. I'm reminded that I'm reminded that I'm to be the judge of no one.

Salvation of those I love and of those I find difficult to love is the work of Jesus. The insurmountable power of our Lord is not to be questioned. God knows no limits.

It is my faith that death is not the end, for anyone. It is my belief that Jesus, all of Jesus, is everywhere. It is my great joy that Jesus' saving grace is available to every soul.

Even the possibility that this is the message of Jesus is a lot for Peter to miss.

Peter was setting his mind on human things as he focused on the suffering, rejection, and murder of the Messiah. He still hadn't understood the power of the Messiah; a greater power than he had ever thought possible. We need to remember that too. Peter hadn't yet understood the divinity of the human Jesus.

Jesus' rebuke is telling Peter to listen, to listen to the whole story. Jesus will defeat death, his own and as amazing as it is, he will defeat death for all who accept his most precious gift.

Death is not the end. Hope lies in the power of Jesus.

There are endless reasons to show honor and respect to Jesus. Countless reasons to defend our God with the worshiping love of a child and there are endless ways to show this honor and respect to God.

Loving our neighbor, loving ourselves, and loving our enemies. Reaching out with love to those in need. Not only with our money, but with our time. Reaching out with every kindness that we ourselves have ever wanted.

Our actions could be the answer to someone else's prayer.

Our hope rests on Jesus' whole story. Our hope rests on the power of God. Power greater than anything we can even imagine.