

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost - Year A

24 Sunday of Quarantine (25th overall)

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Jeremiah 15:15-21

Psalms 26:1-8

Romans 12:9-21

Matthew 16:21-28

08/30/2020

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew:

21From that time on, [after Peter confessed that Jesus was the Messiah,] 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. 22And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." 23But 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." 24Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 25For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. 26For 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? 27"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. 28Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

The Gospel of our Lord.

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Followers of Christ

I normally start my sermons off with “good morning!”, but today, it doesn’t really fit. You see, this past Sunday Jacob Blake was shot seven times. On Wednesday, Kyle Rittenhouse was arrested after being the suspect of a shooting that left two dead and one seriously injured after he allegedly decided to take matters into his own hands. Sound familiar? The minute I stop preaching about the reality of racism in our country, the minute I normalize the behavior that has systematically said that people of color are automatically criminals, usually deserving of death, and that white people are patriots, or better... *“24Then Jesus told his disciples, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 25For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. 26For 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?”*

In today’s Gospel we pick up the story directly following Peter’s announcement that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. It’s a text that intentionally compares and contrasts both the reader and the disciples’ understanding of what it means to be the Messiah and that this same Messiah must go to Jerusalem, be tortured, die, and rise three days later. And as Douglas R.A. Hare writes: *“While the divine necessity of Jesus’ suffering is stressed, no reason is given.”* But as history has taught us, speaking out gets you killed. And when you challenge the powers that be, you end up dead. I saw a church sign that illustrates this the other day online, it said “We worship a man of color murdered by keepers of the law.” It seems that our problem is nothing new. And it’s this system of violence that Peter is thinking about when he hears that Jesus will suffer and die. Because in Peter’s mind, the Messiah wouldn’t be killed.

In last week’s text we hear three titles for Jesus thrown out that to our ears are often glossed over. But to anyone who heard them in the first century, they were pretty heavy with meaning. Jesus is proclaimed as the “Son of Man,” the “Son of God,” and “Messiah.” In the church we lump these three words together because they come to fruition in Jesus Christ, but they were three different people and titles in the First Century. Now, in case you didn’t know, Jesus’ last name wasn’t “Christ.” Christ is just

the English version of the Greek word *Christos* which in turn is the Greek version of the Hebrew word “Messiah.” And as Dr. Willumson told the Intro to Religion class at Wheeling Jesuit University, Messiah just means smothered in oil. It literally means “anointed one,” and was how kings were “crowned.” And the greatest king in Israel’s history was King David. David was responsible for the largest expansion of the kingdom that Israel had ever seen, and ever since the Babylonians took over, they had been waiting for someone as strong and powerful to come and sweep away the Babylonians, then the Greeks, then the Romans.

The assumption was that the Messiah would be someone with almost supernatural powers who would restore Israel to power and in battle defeat all its enemies. But Jesus wasn’t just the Messiah, he was also the “Son of Man.” This title has its roots in the book of Daniel from the Hebrew Scriptures. The scholar John J. Collins points out that this person was understood as “the patron saint of Israel.” And that it isn’t until the first century that these two terms become more closely related. Another scholar writes that in the Gospel of Matthew “Son of Man” has two distinctive features as an eschatological (just a fancy word for end times) judge, and as someone who has a kingdom. And finally, Jesus is the Son of God. In Hebrew Scriptures Son of God was a term that was used to connect someone as in relationship with God, in much the same way as we would say that we are a “child of God.” By the first century the term had evolved into a divinely chosen person. It’s important to understand that even by the time the Gospel of Matthew was written that the title “Son of God” did not mean the “Jesus, the Son of God, the Second person of the Trinity.”

So what does all this mean for us? And what in the world does it have to do with our country’s racism problem? Well it means that like Peter, we misunderstand who the Messiah is, and what it means to be a follower. To be a follower of Jesus means that we sacrifice for others. We put others first, and we recognize that a little pain and suffering is part of being a Christian. As Hare writes: *“It is not enough to confess Jesus as Messiah and Lord. He must be acknowledged as suffering and crucified Lord, and acknowledgment must not be one of theory but of practice. To confess Jesus truly means to walk the way of the cross in one’s daily life.”* And that means lining up beside

all our brothers and sisters in Christ when they suffer. Don't believe me? Well, listen to someone a lot smarter than I am:

“9Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; 10love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. 11Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. 12Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. 13Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. 14Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. 17Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. 18If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” 20No, “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.” 21Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” Amen.