

17<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost, 2008 (Proper 17A)

Gospel: Matthew 16:21-28

Old Testament: Jeremiah 15:15-21

Epistle: Romans 12:9-21

Title: Life Together: Crucified With Christ

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It's Labor Day weekend. Tomorrow September begins. The summer is basically over, the kids are back in school, vacation time has come and gone, and it's time to get back to business. Jesus is getting down to business in today's gospel, as well. "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."

Jesus' disciples have been with Him for nearly 3 years now. They've seen and heard amazing things from Jesus. Now Jesus finally explains to His disciples what He's come to do, what He's here for, what His mission is.

You've seen this scene in countless movies. A small number of highly skilled soldiers have been selected for a special mission. They spend weeks training and preparing together, honing their skills and coming together as a unit. They don't know what their mission is, only that it is important, that the security of the country depends on it. Finally, just before they are to go into battle, the commander sits down with his troops. He lays out all the intelligence and explains exactly what their mission is going to be. He explains the risks to them, but also the importance that the mission succeed.

In this gospel lesson, Jesus calls the troops together. He lets them know exact what their mission will be. The destination- Jerusalem. The objective- to suffer, die and rise again. This is what the disciples have been training and preparing for. This is why Jesus chose the disciples- to witness what He is about to do, and then proclaim the good news to all the world. This is Jesus' business.

But this is not what Peter signed up for. He doesn't understand the importance of Jesus' mission. Peter shows that he doesn't understand who Jesus really is and why He's here. Peter has just confessed that Jesus is the Messiah, and the Son of God, but his reaction shows that He doesn't understand what this means. Peter was all for a Jesus who could heal the sick, cast out demons, walk on water, and feed the crowds. This sort of Jesus had real potential. He could really be the Messiah everyone had been waiting for. But a Messiah who suffers and dies, what good is that?

So Peter takes Jesus aside. He tries to point out the problems with Jesus' plan. Suffering and death will not accomplish anything in Peter's mind. Peter doesn't understand God's business. There's God's business and there's man's business. There's God's side, and there is

Satan's side. You are either with Jesus or you are the Enemy. To be with Jesus means the way of suffering, cross and death. It means losing your life. To be with the Enemy means holding on to what you have, it means putting yourself first.

Satan tempted Jesus many times to turn from the way of the cross. First it was in the wilderness, "If you are the Son of God..." do a trick, put on a show, worship me and I'll give you anything. Then it was through Peter, "If you are the Son of God" don't go to Jerusalem and get yourself killed. Finally, when Jesus is hanging on the cross, He will hear Satan say, "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross... save yourself."

Jesus did not come to save Himself. Jesus came to save you. Jesus came to go to Jerusalem and suffer and die there for you. He knew what would happen, and He told His disciples it would happen. But Jesus still went to die, to fulfill the mission. This is what makes Jesus the Son of God and the Messiah. Plenty of other prophets had come, teaching and healing. Some even fed the crowds and even raised the dead. This is not what makes Jesus the Son of God. What makes Him the Son of God is when He dies on the cross. Remember the centurion at the foot of the cross who said, "Truly this is the Son of God."

If you want to play, too, if you want in on Jesus' business, if you're still up for the mission, Jesus tells you exactly what is involved. "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it." Jesus calls you to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Him.

When you hear people talk about bearing their crosses, usually they are talking about situations that are difficult and unpleasant, something they must suffer through. I did a quick internet search on this phrase "my cross to bear," just to see how people are currently using this phrase. When people talk about "their crosses to bear", this is what they include- getting up early, having dry skin, dealing with an upset friend, or cheering for a losing sports team (not that folks in Chicago would know anything about that). But this, of course, is not what Jesus is talking about of here. Being a Cubs fan may cause pain and anguish, but it will not kill you, even here on the South Side.

A cross has only one purpose- and that is to kill. You could replace "cross" with "noose" or "electric chair" for a similar effect. "Take up your noose," "have a seat in the electric chair" and follow me. A cross is used only for executions- not to make people annoyed or uncomfortable. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." To bear your cross means to die.

Death is what makes Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. Death is what makes you a disciple. Not your good works, not your right answers, not anything that comes from you. To be a disciple means to die.

And all of you have already died. In baptism, you were crucified with Christ. Paul writes in Romans 6, "Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death." You

have already died. You have been crucified with Christ. You have died and now have been raised with Christ. Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me."

Jesus' death was followed by resurrection. Your death has been followed by your resurrection, your new life. "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." You now have new life in Christ. Eternal life starts now. This is what Jesus means when He says, "I 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 kingdom of heaven came with Jesus' death and resurrection. The first disciples saw and experienced these things. You have experienced the death and resurrection of Christ as well. And so you now live a new life.

What does this mean? Just look at today's epistle lesson. Here it is once more. This is Jesus' business in the world. This is what your life looks like once you've died and been raised to new life. This is the way that Jesus lives, and so this is how you live when Jesus lives in you:

"Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do 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. On 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." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the only way that our lives look like this, the only way for us to love one another, even our enemies, to be joyful, even in trying times, to live in peace and harmony with one another, is if we die to ourselves, and are raised to new life in Christ.

We are tempted to live life the old way. To do business man's way, the Enemy's way, to avoid death and the cross and cling to our old life. This is why Luther writes, "The old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts, and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise; who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever." In confession and absolution you return to the baptismal font. When you confess your sins and hear Christ's words of forgiveness, you deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him.

This is what Christ is up to this Labor Day weekend. Jesus gets down to business by putting you to death, so that you are also joined to His resurrection.