Text: Matthew 16:21-28

**Introduction**

It is Labor Day weekend, so if patterns hold true, this is the lowest attended worship service of the year. Between the last chance to get away for an extended weekend and the start of football it is tough to compete. And then there might be those who are stuck in the mud at Burning Man.

The reason I throw that out is that it has always humored my mysticism to ponder why certain passages are assigned to certain days. My positive reflection is that the assigned texts end up being amazingly relevant for what is happening way more often than a fixed rotation of gospel readings across three years have a right to be. My more negative reflection has a couple of ways of expressing it. I could say that the texts that we most need to reflect upon tend to show up on low attendance Sundays. Another way to say that though would be that exactly the people who are able to hear the word are those that show up.

That’s a gun pointed in multiple directions. And I certainly don’t like pondering the red laser dot over my chest from it.

**Text**

Remember that what came immediately before our text was Peter’s confession of Christ and Jesus’ exclamation at how blessed Peter was to know this. And how upon exactly this confession He would build his church. You can practically hear the chariots and horsemen of Israel ready to charge.

But then does Jesus accept the crown and blow the trumpet? No. He immediately began to show his disciples that he has to go to Jerusalem.

“Great, that’s exactly where we need to go. Lead the march!”

No, he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things…

“Well, there is no great victory that comes without suffering.”

Suffer many things at the hands of the chief priests and scribes.

“Umm, those are exactly the first people who are going to have to be removed. You are just talking about their resistance. You are just talking about how there will be some loss to their resistance, right?”

And be killed.

At those words Peter springs into action. He takes the man he’s just called the messiah, the one, the Christ, aside and starts to vigorously correct him. “Absolutely not, Lord. This is never ever going to happen to you. You obviously don’t know what it means to be the Christ. It means you get to blow the trumpet and call the chariots and horsemen of Israel. It does not mean that you will be killed. Never. That is not The Christ.”

And Jesus gives to Peter and all who might think this way as strong warning in three parts and then expands on it.

First, if the only way you can think of the Christ is through what the world sees as glorious victory, you are in league with Satan. “Get behind me Satan.”

Second, denying the passion, denying suffering and death even of the messiah in this world, is hindering the mission of God. “You are a hinderance to me.”

Third, the great danger in all things is setting our minds on human things and neglecting the things of God.

**Christology**

Let’s think about the second one first – “you are a hindrance to me.” What is the mission of the Christ?

The mission of the Christ is to secure the salvation of the world. Jesus told Peter that it would be on his confession that he would built his church. And that they would have the keys of the Kingdom, the authority to bind and forgive sins. But all of that stuff, if we consider the creed, is the mission of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who work through the Holy Christian Church in order to forgive sins and prepare a people for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. But that Holy Spirit’s mission proceeds from the Father and the Son. And it is the mission of the Son, the Christ, to secure the firm foundation for the Spirit’s work.

And how has God determined that this is to be done? By the passion and resurrection. That’s the bit that Peter obviously doesn’t hear. I’m not sure anybody could actually understand it before it happened. But Jesus says that he will be killed “and on the third day be raised.” The suffering, death and resurrection are God’s plan to secure the foundation.

This is how God works in this world. Through suffering, death and resurrection. Because this world as it is, is Satan’s. This entire world has been condemned. Its time is short. But God has determined not just to cast everything in this world into the fire, but save as much as He can. And how he does this is suffering, death and resurrection. And the Christ is the firstborn of the dead. It is the path that Jesus walks that opens up the gates for everyone else.

You can say that his death is the sacrifice that pays for everything. The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. You can focus on the resurrection as the victory of God over our last great enemy – death. The gates of brass before him burst the iron fetters yield. You can think of it as Satan’s great overreach. Death only comes from sin, but Satan killed the sinless one by Pilate and the Chief Priests. By the ancient magic and the justice of the Father, resurrection was the only answer. And with one man beyond death a way for others was opened. There are other ways to understand it, but this is how God works. Through suffering, death and resurrection.

**Moral**

And to the extent that we are unwilling to walk that path, we hinder God’s work. If our unwillingness is so adamant – like Peter’s rebuke of Christ – we might find ourselves on Satan’s team.

Because the way that Jesus walked – suffering, death and resurrection – is the way that we are called to walk. “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

It is a choice of worlds that is placed before us. If we want this temporal world we can have it. You are free to pursue the world. You are free to make your best deal with this world’s ruler. But what Jesus asks us is what does that profit us? Even if you strike a deal as good as Augustus Caesar or maybe Keith Richards is a better example. What does it mean if you are part of the world’s greatest rock and roll band, but your music is silenced in eternity? What if you gain the entire world and forfeit your eternal life?

The choice placed before us is: are we going to put our minds on the things of man, or the things of God? And the things of God – the things of the Father – are following his Son. Following Jesus though suffering, death and resurrection. “Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

**Eschatological**

Because the Son, having secured that work of the Spirit, will blow that trumpet one day. “The Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of the Father.”

What Peter wanted, the victorious Christ, does happen. It just happens in a much larger way. The Christ was not competing for some slice of this world. The Christ secured the new creation. This old world will be judged. “He will repay each person according to what he has done.”

If you received all your good in the things of man, you have already received your reward. And it will all burn away in the fires when that chariots and horsemen of Israel sweep across and roll it up.

If you took up your cross, even at the last hour, if you set you mind on the things of God, your life is secure in Christ. You will receive your reward.

**Conclusion**

We must come to see our crosses the way that Jesus does. This is the mind of God. This is how God works. This suffering, this cross that we experience now, is participating the in the work of God. A filling up of the sufferings of Christ. The sufferings of the people of God that God himself restores. Some are restored for a time now. Some are held for the resurrection. But our sufferings, if they are submitted to Christ, are never a loss. The Christian waits in faith for the promise that they will be repaid. Amen