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Lent 2

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“A New Life on A New Page”

Text: Mark 8:27-38 (Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16; Romans 5:1-11)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Peter and the other eleven disciples had learned their lesson well . . . at least the first half. They knew who Jesus was. Peter confidently asserts **“You are the Christ.”** Matthew, in his Gospel, tells us Peter spoke even more, adding *“the Son of the living God (Matt 16:16).”* And the others nodded in agreement behind Peter. They had seen Jesus heal the sick, cleanse lepers, expel demons, teach with an authority never before heard or seen, command creation with His word and have it obey, and even raise the dead. There was no question to them who Jesus was. Others may not have realized this yet, thinking instead that Jesus was John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the other Old Testament prophets come back to life. But *they* knew. Lesson learned. Midterm exam passed.

So now begins the second half of their education. They knew who Jesus was - they did not yet understand what He had come to do. All the miracles and teaching was great, but the greatest work was still to come. ***And [so Jesus] began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.***

Now, as 21st century Christians, I think it’s hard for us to appreciate just how utterly absurd and wrong that sounded to Peter and the others. Those are words we hear *at least* every Sunday; words that are embedded in our hearts and in our liturgy; words that are what the Christian faith is all about. But for Peter and the other eleven disciples, it would have been like when you’re on the internet and you click on a link that doesn’t exist; you get a page that pops up on your screen that says: *“Page 404 error - that page does not exist.”* Or if you’re not on the internet, it would be like dialing a telephone number and getting that annoying recorded message after those *really* annoying tones - *“do-do-doot . . . I’m sorry, the number you have dialed is not in service.”*

That’s what happened in the minds of the twelve when Jesus said these words about rejection and suffering and crucifixion - it was a link that didn’t exist; it was *“do-do-doot . . . that number is not in service.”* Their minds could not yet grasp that the Messiah who had come to save the world would do so by dying. That the Messiah

who had come to save the world would not save Himself. That the Messiah who had come to save the world would be destroyed by the very people He had come to save. It just doesn't make sense.

And so Peter takes Jesus aside - isn't that interesting? Peter does this *privately* - and he begins to rebuke Jesus. The student is correcting the teacher. Mark doesn't tell us what he said, but again, Matthew has the details, telling us that Peter says, *No Lord, this shall never happen to you* (Matt 16:22). Some scholars think that Peter was actually speaking from faith here, that he was saying: Don't worry! Your Father would never let something like that happen to His Son. . . . But it is usually not a good idea to correct the teacher! They know what they're talking about. So Jesus now has to rebuke Peter: ***"Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."***

Note well what Jesus is saying there: that page may not exist in your mind Peter, but it is the mind of God. In fact, not only would the Father not stop this, this is exactly why the Father sent His Son. And not only would the Father *let* it happen, the Father has a hand in it. For as the prophet Isaiah had proclaimed: the Messiah *"would be stricken, smitten, and afflicted by God . . . and the Lord would lay on him the iniquity of us all"* (Isaiah 53:4, 6)."

Peter and the others had a lot to learn.

This is how God would fulfill His promise to Abraham, to bless all nations through him, through his promised offspring. This was God, as St. Paul wrote, *dying not for good or righteous people, but for sinners* - even those who put Him on that cross. This is how God would reconcile the world to Himself; a world made perfect that had been plunged into sin, the perfect God would make holy again by being plunged into the very same sin, into its very deepest depths of suffering, death, and the grave. The justice and righteousness God demanded He Himself would provide, that in His resurrection the world be raised from sin and death to life again.

And so Jesus must die. There was no other way.

And so Peter must learn to put his faith in this word, for this word is what his faith is given to believe. Not to make sense, not to add up, not to be what Peter thought or expected, but to believe. For you can say and believe a lot of things about Jesus, but if you don't have the cross, you have not Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, but some other Jesus, who is no Saviour at all.

That's why Jesus' rebuke to Peter. ***"Get behind me, Satan!"*** may at first blush seem a bit harsh, but this is the satanic doctrine - to have Jesus without the cross, and so have no Jesus at all. But faith clings to what it is given. Faith clings to the word,

even when that word is the word of the cross. For there is no other way. To do anything else is to make the same mistake as Peter . . .

Which brings us to the rest of Jesus' teaching, when He called the crowd of people to Himself, along with His disciples, and said to all of them: ***"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it."***

Now, here is where you perhaps experienced a "Peter moment" - a "Page 404 error," a "do-do-doot," in your own mind! For Jesus' cross is one thing; but a cross for me? To lose my life? And so we often do the Peter thing, and take Jesus aside and tell Him, *"No Lord, this shall never happen to me."*

We do that, you know. When husbands won't lay down their lives for their wives, and wives don't submit to their husbands. When children don't obey their parents. When parents exasperate their children. When rather than do what we've been given to do, we let our own sinful desires reign and rule in our hearts. We all do it. We try to save our lives, our own little kingdoms, and hang on to it as long as we can. Because that's what we know. That's the page we're on.

But what Jesus is doing here - with Peter and the other disciples and the crowds and you and me - is giving us a new page; a new way of thinking; a new mind - *the mind of our heavenly Father*. We may think we know what this world and life are all about and how to get by and how to achieve success and happiness and maybe even fame . . . but where does it all end up? The grave. Steve Jobs is dead. President Reagan is dead. Whitney Houston is dead. Those people in the Midwest hit by the tornadoes this week, many are suddenly dead. And one day - unless Jesus comes back first - you and I will join them. So maybe the page we live on and our way of thinking *isn't* so great. Maybe there's a better way . . . a better page . . .

"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it."

And so as Peter and the others had to learn, so we have to learn: *the cross is the way to life*. True life. This is not just a call to suffer, it is a call to die. To delete that page in your mind that you're currently living on, that makes sense to you, that you think is so great, and live on the page you are given by Christ. The page of the cross. That page that teaches us that **we only begin to live when we die**.

We only begin to live when we die . . . Wait, I know! "Do-do-doot!" "Page 404 error," right? Well, maybe not. For you've been baptized, which means that you

have died with Christ and been raised to a new life. You repent of your sins, which means to die to and put to death those old sinful urges and life and be raised to a new life in the forgiveness of your sins. You have, in fact, begun to live because you have died and been raised with Christ to a new life. A new life on a new page, where having been given a new life, made a child of God, given the Holy Spirit, and promised the kingdom of heaven, you can deny yourself because Christ has given you everything you need. You can deny yourself and lay down your life for others. You can deny yourself and follow your Saviour. You can live as He lived, love as He loved, and die as He died, confident that death is no longer the end. For death no longer has the last word - Jesus and His resurrection do.

That's a life worth living. A life that will never end. It's not easy! Your old sinful flesh will keep dragging you down; satan will keep tempting you to go back to your old sinful home page. And so our Lord comes to you today here in His Supper, to feed you with His Body and Blood, to feed you with His life and forgiveness, to strengthen and keep you firm in the faith. The faith that He has given you, the life that He has given you. That ***when He comes again in the glory of His Father with the holy angels***, you will not be ashamed. You will not be ashamed of your sins, for they are forgiven. You will not be ashamed of Jesus, for He is your life. And He will not be ashamed of you, for you are His dearly beloved.

That's a life worth living.
That's a death worth dying.
That's a Saviour worth believing.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.