

Jesu Juva

“Back to Kindergarten”

Text: Matthew 16:21-28 (Romans 12:9-21)

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

Peter thought he had it all figured out. Jesus as the Christ, the promised Messiah, the Saviour. It seemed like everything was coming together nicely. Everywhere Jesus went, the crowds were getting larger. And the signs Jesus was doing just kept increasing His celebrity and popularity - healing the sick, cleansing lepers, making the lame walk, the blind see, the deaf hear, and the mute speak, casting out demons, raising the dead, calming the seas, feeding the multitudes, and preaching the kingdom - that in Him, the kingdom of heaven had come near. And it sure seemed like heaven on earth when you were with this Jesus.

Oh sure, there were some bumps along the way. Jesus had His naysayers and those who opposed and challenged Him. But He always one-upped the religious types at their games; He was always able to put them down and put them back in their place. No one knew God's Word better than Jesus. No one ever won an argument with Jesus. Yes, life was good with Jesus.

And Peter was feeling pretty good about himself as well. In the verses right before those we heard today in the Holy Gospel, Peter had just made the great confession that *Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God*. And for this, Jesus had called him *blessed!* Yes, things were on the right track, and Peter could only be excited about the future and what Jesus would do next. Peter thought he had it all figured out.

So how unexpected, then, how completely out of left field, how absolutely, utterly, 100% *wrong* were the next words Jesus then said. ***From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.***

Now, if Peter had been one of our modern day GPS systems, the words coming out of his mouth next would have been: *recalculating! recalculating!* Jesus was making a wrong turn here, speaking nonsense! And Peter - Peter the blessed; Peter to whom Jesus as the Christ had been revealed to him by the Father in heaven Himself! as Jesus had said - Peter had to get Him back on the right track. So out it comes - the rebuke: ***Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never, no way, not in a million years, happen to you.***

And how stinging those next words of Jesus must have sounded to Peter, as they burned into his ears and cut into his heart: ***Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me.***

For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man. . .
. And Peter the blessed, becomes Peter the goat. Peter who thought he had everything figured out, Peter the Ph.D., becomes Peter who couldn't be more wrong and who needs to go back to Kindergarten again.

But do you remember a few years ago, there was a book that came out with the title: *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten?* So don't despair Peter, but learn again this basic truth: this is what it means for Jesus to be the Saviour, not what you think. That Jesus **must** go to Jerusalem and suffer at the hands of His enemies, be killed, and on the third day be raised. He **must**. There is no other way and no other kind of Saviour. He **must** do this and go this way. The cross was the plan, the destination. It would not be an accident, but intentional. It would not be a tragedy, but using a great miscarriage of justice in an act of brutality, He would lay down His life, for no one could take it from Him (John 10:18). He would endure the worst of deaths *and look like a loser*. A great fall from the heyday of His popularity.

But the result of all this would be life. On the third day He would rise from the dead. And what looked like defeat would be victory. Victory not just over His earthly opponents and naysayers - that is a victory far too small and really of no consequence. No, this would be victory over His *real* enemies - our enemies - sin, death, and the devil. He took our side against them and succumbs to them in order to defeat them. He **must**, *for us*. For those are enemies too powerful for us.

Now, many of you probably learned that in Kindergarten. It is the first and basic truth we learn as we grow up in Church - that the man we see on the cross is Jesus, and He's dying there for me and for you, for the forgiveness of our sins. That's what we deserve, because of our sins. But Jesus took it in our place, and then rose to life to give us life. That's what it means that Jesus is Saviour.

Basic, right? And so maybe you've been sitting there this morning thinking: Pastor, we know this.

OK. Then how come you act like Peter? . . . *Oh yes you do!* And here's how: for in response to Jesus' next statement - ***If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*** - you think: *Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to **ME**.*

Because like Peter, you think you've got it all figured out too. Your plans, your life. Spouse, family, job, home, success, achievement, retirement. You're a baptized child of God and your Father promised He'd take care of you and all your needs. You come to church, your sins are forgiven, sometimes you even like the hymns, so it's full steam ahead! Life is good with Jesus.

But then, like Peter, the cross comes and intrudes on all you think you knew, all you planned, all you thought was good and right. So you try to *recalculate* - figure out how you can throw off that cross and get back on the road to your plans. Or if that's not possible, maybe you rebuke God too, like Peter. *God, why are you doing this to me? This isn't right! This is not how it's supposed to go . . .*

Oh, but it is, you Peters. This **must** happen. For your good. For your life. You can cling to your plans, you can cling to your life, you can cling to the way you think things should be and throw off God and His cross and His work in your life - you can do that. And many do. A baby? Not in the plans. And so a little boy or girl is aborted. A spouse of the opposite sex? Not what I want. Obey my parents? But they're stupid! (So are my teachers, my boss . . .) Give up my golf game or the football game on TV for my family? Not gonna happen. Forgive? Not after what they did to me . . . *again!* Help my neighbor? Maybe if he'd do something for me once in a while! Repent? But Pastor, you just don't get it, and everyone's doing it! You can do that, in those and lots of other ways. But know this too: ***whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?***

So back to Kindergarten for all of us. ***If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*** It is common to think that means that Christians have to suffer. It doesn't mean that at all. You might, maybe even you will. But to take up the cross means more than that. A lot more than that. **For Jesus doesn't want you to suffer, He wants you dead.** Jesus doesn't want you "dead or alive," He wants you dead and then alive. Dead and then alive in Him. Dead and then alive in His cross and resurrection. Dead and then alive in your baptism, and then to live in your baptism each day. Dying to your "I got it all figured out;" dying to your "my way or the highway;" dying to your clinging to the things of this world and life . . . and living in Jesus and clinging to Him, and His forgiveness, and His victory, which is much bigger than what we see and know here and now. A life and a victory that will never end, no matter what happens to you here and now.

And so to pry your cold, stony fingers and your hard, calloused hearts off the things of this world, to humble your proud mind and your "I got it all figured out" attitude, the Lord sends the cross into your life. Not to hurt you or harm you or just to make you suffer, but to help you. To save you. That you die and rise with Jesus and in Him every day, and so live. *Really* live. Not just a life filled with stuff here. That would be like Jesus just gaining victory over His *earthly* opponents and naysayers - that is a life far too small and really of no consequence. Jesus has more for you than that. And so His cross and so your cross. Jesus for you and you in Him.

And what does such a life look like? Go back and read the words we heard from St. Paul in Romans today. Don't do it now! Listen now. But later, read those verses again. There

are some whoppers in there, and maybe you'll be tempted to react like Peter did. But that's your calling as a Christian. To do those things as a "living sacrifice" (Romans 12:1) in your home, your school, your workplace, your church, your neighborhood, everywhere. And sometimes, it's going to be pretty heavy, the crosses you will bear in those things. But you will see this too - the work of God your Saviour in you and through you and for you.

For to follow Jesus doesn't just mean to suffer and it doesn't just mean to obey - *it means to follow Him to the cross*. To die and rise with Him. The death and resurrection begun in baptism, when the sign of His cross was placed upon you and given to you in the water with the Word. That's now yours to live in, because Jesus is yours to live in, and He in you. His forgiveness, His life, His salvation, all yours. And strengthened in you now as you come to receive the Body and Blood He gave into death and raised to life for you. That you rise too, to life with Him even now, but finally and fully when *the Son of Man comes with all his angels in the glory of his Father*.

And when He does, Jesus then said, *he will repay each person according to what he has done*. Which sounds ominous, but don't be afraid of that! For that doesn't so much mean all the good things you have done - or not! - but rather this: that those who die and rise with Christ here, in baptism, in repentance and faith, in forgiveness, in the cross, have the promise that will on the Last Day you will live even though you die. For as St. Paul said earlier in his letter to the Romans: *For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his* (Romans 6:5). A resurrection to joy, to peace, to glory, to angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. To live there, in that, forever.

So remember that, all you Peters, what you learned in the Kindergarten of your faith. It is still true today, and will be always. Rejoice and be glad! **The cross is the way to life.**

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