

Holy Trinity Sunningdale
Sunday August 30, 2020
Reading – Matthew 16: 21-28
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Our reading today contains some very challenging words from Jesus. I must admit that I did not find it easy reading at all and some of you like me might find it hard to understand. Here is my feeble attempt to break it down with 3 sections.

1. V. 21-23 – Here Jesus begins to tell his disciples of the sufferings and death that await him. He rebukes Peter when Peter tries to tell him it cannot be like that because for Peter, a messiah doesn't lose, a messiah wins so everyone can worship him. We can remember that in his temptation by the devil in the wilderness, Jesus heard the same message Peter was trying to give him of how he can achieve greatness without suffering and dying. But that is not the perspective of God. And Jesus chose God's way.
2. V. 24-26 – Jesus uses this as a teaching opportunity to point out that true discipleship involves bearing the cross of death to self. Self-denial must be more important than worldly gain. Just as Jesus chose God's way over and above what would have been an easy way to avoid suffering, Jesus uses this picture of the suffering Messiah to explain what God expects from each of his followers.
3. V. 27-28 – Here Jesus predicts his coming again in glory. Jesus tells his disciples and us that there is more than this life. Without Christ, we make choices as though this life is all there is whereas, this life is just the introduction to eternity. How we live in this present world determines our lives in eternity. 3 of Jesus' disciples – Peter, James and John, caught a glimpse of his eternal glory when he was transfigured in their presence as recorded in Matthew 17:1-3.

In summary, this seemingly complicated passage is about Jesus heading to Jerusalem where he would face suffering and crucifixion. Peter was horrified that Jesus should sacrifice his life in this way and urged him to turn back. But for Jesus, there was no turning back. He has come for one purpose to tell everyone – including you and I that God loves us. The cross is where we see God's love for us. It is by going to the cross that Jesus models the selfless love of God. It is the cross of Christ that teaches us how we should live our lives doing the will of God and obeying his commandment. Jesus sums up all the commandments as loving God and loving people.

And Jesus demonstrated God's love by loving us enough to suffer and die on the cross for us. He wants us to do the same for our fellow men and women. So, Jesus tells us to deny ourselves. Self-denial is not about giving up chocolates for Lent or like I do, giving up coffee for Lent. Self-denial means crossing out the word "I" altogether. An "I" crossed out is a cross, the symbol of self-sacrificing love. And that, says Jesus, is just how much we should love other people if we are his disciples. I often tell teacher-trainees, that in class there are many children, some are so cute and loveable they will love them at first sight but their duty of care and responsibility lie more with those children who are hard-work to love.

I wonder who is hard to love in your life and in my life. Jesus didn't pay much attention to the teachers of the law, the Pharisees and Sadducees. Instead, he went in search of the outcasts, the marginalized and those society has ostracized as

unimportant and he calls you and I to do the same. Can we put self aside and share God's love with those in need of it?

Let us pray.

Prayers

Jesus asks, "Are you tired? Are you worn out? Come to me. Walk with me, watch how I do it, and follow my example. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you will learn to live freely and lightly."

In our hearts, let us respond to Jesus.

Lord Jesus Christ, we come to you. We spend so much of our lives wanting more stuff, more money, more friends, more applause, more miracles. Today, we put away our superheroes' cape and thank you, very simply, that because we have you, we have everything we need.

We turn our prayer focus on others and pray for those people who really don't have enough for their daily needs. In our hearts, we name such people known to us. We remember also places in the world in crises and places in our community where God's justice and mercy are desperately needed. Lord God, in your mercy, heal the sick, provide for the poor and bring peace to your world.

Spirit of the Sovereign Lord, anoint us this week to proclaim good news to the poor. Send us out this week to bind up the broken-hearted. Help us this week to proclaim freedom for captives and release from darkness for the prisoner. May we in all we think, say and do proclaim Christ by sharing his love with everyone we come in contact with. Amen.