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Grace and Holy Trinity Church  
Proper 17 A

## **Matthew 16:21-28**

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Last week in Bo's sermon he explored the relationship between fact and belief and action. "Who you say Jesus is" determines the fact and the fact determines how you act.

Let us consider Peter as a case study for that statement: If Peter believes that Jesus is the Messiah, and Jesus has renamed Simon, Peter the rock upon which the church will be planted. Peter has walked on water (if only for a moment), and followed Jesus along with his brother Andrew and the others for years. Peter trusts Jesus. Peter loves Jesus. Peter knows Jesus is someone who speaks truth to power, who challenges the sadducees and the pharisees, the Romans and the Jews alike.

So then why does Peter say God forbid it, when Jesus tells him what has to come to be in order for the prophecy to be fulfilled? Peter says God forbid, because he doesn't want it to be true. He doesn't want Jesus to sacrifice himself. He doesn't want the Messiah to be the offered up to die. And that makes sense, why would Peter want to see him crucified? Why would any of the disciples want to see him suffer? Why would those who follow him want to watch and witness all of what was to come in Jerusalem the trial, to the cross and the unknown.

I don't know if I would or could. I don't know that I'd have the fortitude to follow Jesus in that way, for all that Peter does and says in scripture, this is probably the one thing that I can totally agree with him about. No Lord, say it isn't so. Please don't let this be the way that things have to unfold. Can't there be another way? After all you walked

on water, you fed thousands of people, you healed the sick, you make the lame walk, you can find away to make this different. You are the Son of God. You can do anything.

Jesus responds Not today Satan, not today, today now stop focusing on worldly things, focus on divine things. For Peter there is a choice to be made here, think about how the world is or think about how the world will be when the Kingdom of God has come near. Peter can't be focused on both death and life. Christians can't be focused on what we are giving up, what we are losing and what we are gaining simultaneously. Can't have your cake and eat it too.

If we make the choice to know that Jesus is the Messiah, the choice is to follow him. Then everything else must become secondary. When we chose to be Christians, at Baptism and Confirmation, when we take on these covenantal promises upon ourselves. In taking up our Crosses and following Jesus we are going to lose- and we are going to lose a lot.

We die when we are baptized. We die as individuals. We die as people of this world. We die to our families of origin. We die to become members of the Church triumphant.

For most of us here at Grace and Holy Trinity we tend speak about this death metaphorically in the 21st century. Our lives have never been threatened due to our spiritual inclination. For many of us here our lives will never be threatened because we are affirmed in our Christian belief, but that is not true for all the world. That was not true for the first Christians, or for modern Christians in Syria, in the Sudan, or in various other places where Christians are targets for violence.

I say this not to belittle the plight of Christians, or to make light of the choices that we make to follow Jesus, but to remind everyone here that being a Christian isn't something that is meant to be easy. We aren't following Jesus to win popularity contests, or to hold on to political power, or to be part of some exclusive club.

Jesus doesn't promise that getting to the Kingdom of Heaven will be a cakewalk. Jesus instead promises death and suffering and loss. So why do we baptize infants, why do we teach our children to believe and act on that belief and why does anyone follow Him?

We follow Jesus because we believe in what he teaches, just like Peter, just like Andrew and James and John, Mary Magdalen and Salome, and all the others. We follow Jesus because the promise of the Messiah is the promise of a new world, a world where justice and peace reign and where reconciliation is possible. We follow Jesus not because he walks on water, or because he heals the sick or because he makes the lame walk. We follow Jesus because those miracles point to who God is and how God wants the world to be.

In today's reading from Romans we are reminded that the Love of God- Agape- is stronger than hate. We are reminded that as ministers of love in the world that we promise and endeavor to "Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers." This is what it means to be Christian. This is what it means to follow in Jesus footsteps.

Despite our love and admiration for the man Jesus, it is not our duty to save Him. He doesn't need to be saved, in order to fulfill the Messianic teachings Jesus needed to become a perfect sacrifice. We however do need to love one another as much as we love Jesus and we need to be willing to attempt to save our fellow human beings, those whose dignity and honor and health and safety are threatened because of perceived differences. We need to care for one another because the other, the stranger and the saint are equally representative of the Messiah, the Christ in the world today. We are called to care for one another full stop. We are all in this life together and we are called to love with radical and world changing love, not because it benefits us,

not because through love we are blessed, but because through God's love we are transfigured, we become more of who we were born to be and more readily able to reflect God's love to this imperfect world.

I can stand here and recite a litany of names of those who have stood in the face of hatred and evil. I can invoke the spirit of nonviolent resistance embodied in the sacrifices of Dr. King, or Jonathan Merrick Daniels or Heather Heyer. But for most of us we are not going to face martyrdom when pursuing justice in our daily life and work as we usher in the kingdom of God and pray to see peace on the earth. For most of us here the sacrifices we are being asked to make are personal relationships, creature comforts, and earthly expectations.

So what expectations held near and dear are those that Jesus has challenged? What do beliefs about what the Messiah, the Christ is going to do have been changed as life unfolds around you? Where is Jesus seen at work? How is He present in the lives of refugees, the LGBTQIA+ community, the homeless, the addicted, the hungry, the lonely, the imprisoned, the poor? Where do you reflect the surprising awe inspiring savior of the world in this community in this creation that is continually is being broken open to allow the world that is meant to be to be seen? What expectations have you or are you willing to give up to see that world come to fruition? What does being called to follow Jesus cost?

For Peter is was a willingness to leave family. A willingness to step out on the stormy sea. A willingness to take on a new name a new identity and a new understanding of old expectations. Am I willing to trust in God like Peter? Are we willing to love unconditionally? Are you willing to love Jesus so much that you are going to not forbid him to do anything that will bring about the Kingdom?

How much do you trust in Jesus? Do you trust Him enough to let him go? Do you trust him enough to turn the other cheek? Do you trust him enough to give up your privilege? To stand in solidarity and love while people spit, hit, and take what by all worldly rights is yours. To pray for

them while they revile and rebuke and mock for believing in the divine essence of Mary's child. To show the love of God for friend and neighbor, for saints and sinners, for those who agree and those who disagree- to stand up and say not today Satan not today and affirm that Love can conquer hate?

The world encourages us to fight fire with fire. Hate with hate. Violence with violence. But Jesus shows us that there is another way. Jesus teaches us that all that we have and all that we are are two different things. We have nothing that is not given by God. We are nothing if we are not loved by God. God has shown infinite love and mercy and grace by becoming incarnate and by entering into Jerusalem to face judgment and hate to face persecution and execution Jesus, God incarnate gave up EVERYTHING for us so that we can follow him and give up all that we have so that we can be everything we are meant to be.

So let us follow like Peter and be more like the disciples that God created us to be. Light bearers in the darkening world.

Life bearers in a hate filled time.

Grace bearers in a divided culture.

Let us show through intentional contemplative prayer that reconciliation is possible.

Let us stop yelling to save the status quo and instead let us stand for what we believe and follow in the footsteps of Christ letting our lives speak love.

Let our lives speak the truth that we believe. Let our actions be transfiguring.

Let us be renamed and renewed like Simon, I mean like Peter, let us believe and act differently because we know that Jesus is the Messiah.

Amen

