

Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost
September 25, 2011
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Matthew 16:21-26

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? (NIV)

I can't speak for all of you, but I know for myself I do not like to lose. It really doesn't matter what we are talking about because it is just part of my makeup and competitive nature. I detest any kind of losing. Lisa gets mad at me sometimes because even if I am playing go fish or memory with my daughter in kindergarten I will not just let her win because then that means I lose. Even if you are not so competitive, isn't this true to some degree in all of us? We want to be on the top and not the bottom, be the popular ones and not the unpopular, be the winners not the losers, be the best and not the worst. Whether it is with our health or wealth, our relationships or our jobs, who of us wants to end up losing?

This is why Jesus' words for His disciples this morning are more than a bit difficult to digest. Pain is gain? Loss is good? Being a loser is the way to go? This seems completely backwards to us and our sinful natures. We want pleasure not pain. We want comfort not catastrophe. We want glory not grief. We want a crown not a cross. Yet Jesus tells us the opposite. He teaches us what true discipleship is all about in this world. Listen carefully as Jesus instructs us on this perplexing truth: **Losing is Living.**

Peter, speaking for all the disciples, had just made a wonderful confession of faith. In answer to Jesus' question of who Jesus is, he replied: *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* Jesus said this was revealed by God the Father and is the true confession upon which the Church will be built. Christ, the Son of God, will be the cornerstone. But now Jesus wants them to know how and why: *"From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."* There is now a shift in the ministry and teaching of Jesus. From now on the cross would loom larger and larger on the horizon and Jesus' disciples needed to know it. Jesus had made several veiled references to His death and resurrection before this, but from this time on Jesus begins to spell it out in unmistakable language.

Jesus goes on to explain that He will end up losing - big time! He will lose everything, including His own life. And Jesus knows why He must suffer these many things. Jesus knows why He must fall into the wicked hands of the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law. Jesus knows why He must be killed and on the third day raised to life. By grace you and I know why too - it was for us and our sins. But the disciples clearly do not at this point understand. We read: "**Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"**" No doubt Peter loves Jesus. No doubt Peter has the best interests of Jesus in mind. But think of what Peter is doing and saying here. He is telling Jesus He is wrong. Peter pulls Jesus aside and rebukes Him. Perhaps Peter was emboldened by the glowing review Jesus just gave to Him after confessing Jesus to be the Christ? But Peter is stepping over the line here by saying what I'm sure the others were thinking. "*Jesus, you are going to suffer intensely at the hands of your enemies? No way. These Jewish leaders who have been constantly after you are finally going to get the best of you? Not going to happen. The Christ, the almighty Son of God will be killed? Never! This shall never happen to you!*" Peter boldly says no way to what Jesus says must happen, and Peter is wrong.

Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." Strong words to speak to a dear disciple and close companion! But Jesus knows exactly what was happening. The devil was at work here. He was working through Peter. What a temptation! The devil was saying avoid the pain, avoid the suffering, avoid the cross, avoid losing your life. How could this ever happen to you? This is why Jesus answers so strongly and quickly. "**Get behind me, Satan!**" Jesus knows Satan is trying to be a stumbling block to His mission of saving sinners. He rebukes Peter for having in mind the things of men and not the things of God.

How often dear friends do we do the same! We don't like losing. Many times we have in mind the things of men instead of the things of God. We take the easy path rather than follow the guidance God gives us in His Word. We listen to Satan's lies. Note here that Satan will use even those closest to us. When we have friends and family who, despite their best intentions, go against God's Word they are wrong. A friend, who just wants you to be happy, that tells you to end your marriage or move in with your girlfriend or boyfriend. A family member who encourages and helps you to lie on your resume or put down a co-worker to get the promotion you desire. The classmate that tells you to go along with the sinful actions of the group so you can belong with the popular crowd. Anytime anyone offers advice contrary to God's Word or persuades us to go against God they are doing the work of the devil. Satan will use even those closest to us and God wants us to recognize it and say: "**Get behind me, Satan!**"

This is not always easy. Sometimes we will face persecution and suffer loss for it. Jesus never promises the path of discipleship will be without trouble and trial. "**Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"**" Deny myself? *gulp* Take up my cross? *double gulp* Lose my life? *triple gulp* These are tough words to swallow. Jesus pictures a scene before an earthly court where a person

must make a decision about taking a stand for Jesus. To deny Jesus to save your earthly life results in the loss of true life. But when you give no thought to your earthly life, if you are willing to risk even death by confessing Jesus, you will find life.

The choice for us may not always be so dramatic. I pray no one ever holds a sword to our throats and says deny Jesus and live or confess Jesus and die, but the principle for us remains. If our primary concern is to save this life, to get the most out of this life in pleasure and satisfaction for ourselves, we will end up losing everything. But when we follow Jesus through thick and thin, when we dedicate ourselves to our Savior, follow His guidance, we will have a meaningful and God pleasing life in this world and enjoy all the blessings of eternal life in heaven. Jesus teaches His disciples that losing is living.

After all, Jesus makes the point that even if we somehow were able to gain the whole world, own and possess it all, what good would that do before God? Offering God the whole world would not be enough to pay for a single one of our sins. Giving God billions of dollars wouldn't be enough to save us from hell. There is only One who rescued our souls by giving up His life as a ransom. Only the precious blood of Jesus and His innocent suffering and death could save us from eternal death. That's why Jesus did not waver from the path God set for Him even though that path meant the cross. Jesus knew to save us He must suffer many things, be killed, and then on the third day be raised to life. To know this, to follow Jesus, now that's living.

Peter learned this too. He learned that it is first the cross then the crown. He learned to no longer live for himself, but to live for Jesus who died for him and was raised again. Peter learned to pick up his earthly crosses, to suffer, in order to follow Jesus. Peter even lost his life for Jesus. Tradition tells us that Peter was martyred on an upside down cross. You see, for Peter, losing was living! Was such sacrifice for his Savior worth it? I guess you can ask Peter that question yourself when you get to heaven. I'm pretty sure we already know the answer.

So what about us? Did we pay close attention to some of the words we sang in our last hymn? **Let the world despise and leave me...go, then earthy fame and treasure.** Really? **Come, disaster, scorn, and pain!** Really? For Jesus, yes really! For **in your service pain is pleasure; with your favor loss is gain. (CW 465)** Jesus turns things completely around for us. With Jesus weakness becomes strength, losing is winning, and dying has turned into living. When it comes to following Jesus, living for Him, being His disciple, I guess I don't mind losing after all. For ***“what good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?”*** For Jesus, who won for us eternal life and rescued our souls from hell by suffering the greatest loss, I pray we gladly pick up our earthly crosses and follow Him. May our Savior teach us daily this truth: losing is living! Amen.