

Pentecost 13: Jeremiah 15:15-21, Psalm 26:1-8, Romans 12:9-21, Matthew 16:21-28

### *INTRO*

Good morning everyone — thank you once again for tuning in to this message for today, the 13th Sunday of Pentecost. Right out of the gates you'll notice if you read the lessons assigned for today that the creators of the lectionary had us in mind in our plight against Covid when they assigned Psalm 26 to us:

“I wash my hands in innocence and go round your altar, O Lord” —Psalm 26:6

So keep that hand washing going everyone — King David certainly doesn't want us to lag in our diligence or lay aside any precautionary measures...

Last week we looked at the first part of a conversation that Jesus had with his disciples in Caesarea Philippi — a city known for its religious pluralism within the midst of Judea. Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” and the answers of course were various. And then Jesus asked them, “Who do you say that I am?” And Peter, in the high point of his career to date responded, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

We're looking at the question of what makes the church the church. And we see first of all that the church is a community of people who confess Jesus as the Christ — the Saviour of the world (and of course our own Saviour too). “What makes the church the church?” is a good question to ask at a time in which we aren't meeting together in public as we've done for generations. Our church doors have been closed here in Stettler for over 5 months — I wonder if that's ever happened before in the history of our congregation? Today we look at the next part of that conversation between Jesus and his disciples, and in it we discover the next part of the answer to the question of what makes the church the church.

## *YOUR DAD'S MASTERCLASS*

Most people are interested in one way or another in improving themselves — in success, growth, in self-improvement. I suppose there are some people who aren't the least interested in self-improvement, but by and large I think most people are.

Case in point: the MasterClass. Have you seen the commercials for MasterClasses? Some celebrity or expert has developed a class to teach you how to become a skillful filmmaker, a comedian, a negotiator, or a chess player. All you have to do is sign up, & before you know it, Serena Williams is teaching you to be a tennis player, or Chris Hadfield is teaching you about space exploration. They even have Natalie Portman teaching acting... Which raises some questions for me... have you seen *Thor*? I'm not so sure Natalie Portman is the right choice to teach a Masterclass on acting...

Well, I came across a video this week — it's a parody of the MasterClass videos called "Your Dad Teaches Loading the Dishwasher." It's pretty funny, & worth looking up on Youtube — someone's dad teaching you about whether to place the utensils handle up or handle down, how to stack plates & bowls, whether to use liquid soap or pods.

Why do we have such an interest in these things? Well, sometimes we just want to learn something new, & there's definitely something very rewarding & fulfilling in continuing to learn & grow throughout our lives. Maybe you've signed up for online classes from time to time. Sometimes, we do this simply for practical purposes. We want to gain expertise, perhaps to qualify ourselves so that we can get that new job or that promotion. But there is often as well, deep down, a desire in us to be found of worth and to live more fulfilled lives.

## *UPWARD MOBILITY*

In the 70's L'Oreal came up with an advertising slogan — do you know what it is? — "Because I'm Worth It." It's shifted slightly over time, but remains basically the same, from "Because I'm Worth It" to, "Because You're Worth It", to "Because We're Worth It." And that's been their slogan ever since. Now, forgive me for my jadedness towards corporate advertising slogans, but I can't help wonder if it's a coincidence that this company wants to promote women's self-worth precisely at the same moment of wanting to sell something.

But L’Oreal is on to something — they’re right. Not only do we want to improve ourselves, we want to feel worthy, and we want to show others that we are worthy. We’re all of us deeply insecure at times. So we buy stuff to improve our self-worth, and we pursue any variety of strategies for self-improvement so that we can show ourselves more competent, more qualified, more successful — *more worthy*.

### THE WAY OF THE CROSS

When Jesus is talking with his disciples, he tells them something completely unexpected — that he is going to suffer & die before rising again. Instead of espousing the Way of Self-Improvement & of Glory, he tells them about the Way of the Cross. And this is a moment in which Peter stops being a disciple — he stops following Jesus & instead tells Jesus what to do. Imagine pulling Jesus aside & giving him advice & direction on how to do this whole Messiah thing? It was audacious, & it was wrong.

If we are to be Jesus’ followers — the church — then we are to follow him on the Way of the Cross. Eugene Peterson, a pastor & author of *The Message* paraphrase of the Bible writes,

“...Jesus needed to make sure that his own followers did not misunderstand what was involved in following him. Following Jesus is not a path to privilege. It is not a way to get what you want. It is not the inside track to a higher standard of living. In ...the church there have always been a lot of people who expect everything to turn out wonderfully when they commit themselves to God’s ways, worship faithfully, study their Bibles, witness to their friends, and give generously. But it is following Caiaphas [the Jewish High Priest, who played the power games of his day] that gets you that kind of life, not following Jesus. Jesus makes that explicit when he says, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross.’” —Eugene Peterson, *The Jesus Way*, 229.

The Way of the Cross lets go of panicked ladder climbing & the pursuit of success, power, & glory because the Way of the Cross affirms our self-worth — we need not try to prove our worth either to ourselves or to others. The Way of the Cross says you are worth it — worth dying for — and not

because you know how to load a dishwasher properly, or can suddenly prove yourself to be an expert interior designer.

### *THE CHURCH OF THE CROSS*

You want to know what it is to be the church? It's not only being a community that confesses Jesus, but it's also being a community that follows him on the Way of the Cross. This is our DNA, and the early church had to learn this lesson too. They weren't a community characterized by grasping after greater influence, authority, wealth, or power. They were a community characterized by love & sacrifice for others. Our Romans lesson describes this kind of a church:

“Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” —Romans 12:13-16, 21

What are you hanging onto to give you a sense of self worth? Have you ever told Jesus, like Peter, what it is that you need, or want, and how he ought to fulfill your felt needs? What prevents you from considering the needs of others before your own? Could we take the step of utter vulnerability, lay down our self-interests for the sake of those around us, & serve others in Jesus' name?

The cross is Jesus' proof to us of our worth, despite our faults & failures. Jesus says to you, you are worth it — worth carrying a cross for, worth dying & rising for. We can live for ourselves, or we can live for Jesus. But in living for ourselves, we'll lose our soul, & life will be a shell of what it's intended to be. Give up our claim on our lives, surrender ourselves to Jesus, & everything falls together, just like all of those dishes in the dishwasher racks. We'll wake up to the reality of being the church — the community of God — exercising our gifts & growing in joy & in service despite the hardships that come our way. After all, what follows death is resurrection, and that's a promise held out to each & every one of us. Amen.