



Lectionary 22, Year A

*Bishop Julie Schneider-Thomas,
North/West Lower Michigan Synod*

14th Sunday after Pentecost: Gospel Text – Matthew 16:13-20

Matthew 16:21-28

²¹ From that time on, [after Peter confessed that Jesus was the Messiah,] Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised. ²² And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." ²³ But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me, for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

²⁴ Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?

²⁷ "For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. ²⁸ Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

SERMON TEXT:

The churches I used to serve worked together to host a mobile food pantry.

We would line up cars in the parking lot.

Feeding America would drive in with a truck filled with 5,000 pounds of food.

We would unload it, sometimes bag things up and then have the cars drive past the pallets of food as we put boxes and bags into the vehicles.

It's always interesting to see what comes off the truck.

Some things are easy to deal with – like boxes of pop tarts or bags of potatoes.

Sometimes it's hard – a whole crate full of loose apples that need to be bagged.

Every once in a while we get the worst – a whole pallet of assorted food:

onions, assorted potatoes,

giant bags of feta cheese,

cabbage, lettuce, carrots, various boxes of yogurt.

The problem with this kind of pallet is

how do you ever figure out what to give to whom?

We have limited contact with the people receiving the food

and we are trying to keep things moving quickly and smoothly.

It's much better when we can just have apples and oranges and keep them separate.

In a way that's what Peter is struggling with today in the gospel reading.

He has figured out that Jesus is the messiah.

We heard him get the right answer last week:

"You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God."

His moment of glory does not last long.

Jesus starts spelling out exactly what that will look like: pain, suffering, and execution.

Then Peter objects: "No, Jesus. Never.

None of this should ever happen to you the messiah."

That is the wrong answer according to Jesus' response:

"Get behind me Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

Peter goes from rock to stumbling block.

Peter is not alone in his thinking.

The expected Messiah was supposed to be a strong ruler.

Someone who would lead the people to rise up

and push out the occupying Roman army.

Someone who would lead them to freedom and a better life.

Glory, power, strength, force:

those are the words that should describe the Messiah.

I don't fault Peter for his confusion.

The people had had enough of pain and suffering.

In some ways it's easier to live in an "either/or" world.
It's much easier to hand someone a bag of apples and a bag of oranges, rather than pick through a pile of assorted food and try to figure out whether they would like giant bag of feta cheese or a cabbage.

It's easier to know that military and political strength are good and suffering and death are bad.
It's more convenient and takes less mental and emotional energy to sort people into friends or enemies and then treat them as such.
To assume that strangers mean danger and that a neighbor who looks like me is the one I can trust.

It's preferable to know that these are bad:
Hate, evil, suffering, strangers, persecutors,
weeping, revenge,
wrath, enemy, hunger, thirst, death, sacrifice

And that these are good:
affection, honor, zeal, hope, hospitality,
blessing, rejoicing, harmony, peace, food, drink.

But here is what Jesus does. He brings all of these together.....on the cross.
And then he asks us to trust and embrace the mystery of the cross:
That out of the worst of evil, God brings good.
That glory comes through suffering.
That love is for friend, enemy, family and stranger alike.
That in giving things away, we receive.

That in sacrificing our lives, we gain them.
That the best way to treat an enemy is with love.

Maybe it's a bit hard to take,
but we must remember that it is what *saves us*.
If God didn't chose to work this way,
we would be lost because there are times when we oppose God.
When we are stumbling blocks to God, like Peter.

There are times when we take more than our share.
There are times when our words and actions hurt other people.
There are times when we judge people unfairly.

And so it's best to start by recognizing
that if Jesus wasn't willing to suffer and die for those who oppose
him,
if Jesus wasn't willing to feed his enemies,
to love those who oppose him, to love us while we were still
sinners,
we would be doomed.

Thankfully Jesus comes to be the messiah we need,
not necessarily the messiah we want.
As people who are *saved* by the mystery of the cross,
we are also called to be people who *live* by the mystery of the
cross.

That passage from Romans today is so profound.
Paul is teaching us the way of Jesus,
the way of the suffering messiah: *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...Do not repay anyone evil for evil...If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceable with all....if your enemies are hungry feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink...

This doesn't come naturally to us, but it is not impossible.
And in fact it is powerful.

What Paul describes has the power to transform the world.
In fact, it already has.

It is Jesus' victory over death and sin
and God is at work in every deed and word of love
to bring life and joy to the places that are hurting and dying.

Apples and oranges are easier. Good and bad are easier.
But it is the cross and all its messiness in bringing all things
together that is the most powerful.

It is the power of salvation for us and for all of creation.
It is the way out of this mess in which we find ourselves.
It is the power of life.

Copyright © 2026 *The Sermon Supply*

This work is the intellectual property of clergy from the synods of Region 6 of the ELCA. It is provided for use by congregations within these synods for worship, study, and other ministry purposes.

This project is licensed under a **Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)**.

This means:

- Congregations may use and share this material for **non-commercial purposes**, provided proper attribution is given to the *The Sermon Supply* and its contributors.
- The material **may not be modified or adapted** without explicit permission.
- Use beyond congregational purposes requires permission from the contributors.

For permissions beyond this license, please contact rwissler@neos-elca.org

License Details: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.