

**Matthew 16:21-28** <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" <sup>23</sup> 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." <sup>24</sup> Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup> For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. <sup>26</sup> 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? <sup>27</sup> For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. <sup>28</sup> I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

### "The Disillusion of Faith"

I'm sure most of you have seen the optical illusion that I've included with the bulletin. On first glance you look at it and if you're on the lusty side you see a young woman. Then after you stare at it a bit you see she's really just an old hag. You could also look at it from the optimists perspective and see an old hag whose really a young woman. This is an illusion, something which causes an error in perception or belief. Illusions can also come in the form of fantastic plans or dreams that one follows in hopes of something grand. Disillusion is what occurs when the illusion is exposed and the person once enchanted must now deal with reality which isn't such a pretty picture. Well, our passage today is about the disillusionment that comes with faith in Jesus Christ. Catching a glimpse of who he is and what he has come to do shatters our illusions about our own lives and the role we thought God played in it. So here we go. Let's talk about Peter's disillusionment first.



If you remember, last week we talked about Peter's confession of who Jesus is, the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I paraphrased that saying he is the son of the living God through whom God is establishing his reign and putting the world to right. In return, Jesus applauded Peter's confession greatly and tells him that it is upon this rock, upon this confession, that Jesus will build his church. But, Peter's glory was only short lived as our text for this morning shows. One minute Jesus praises him and the next he rebukes him because Peter has illusions about Jesus that he must be freed of to get following Jesus right.

To fill you in on a little more detail, that moment of confession is the turning point of Jesus' ministry. From that moment on Jesus stops his aimless wandering around Galilee doing signs of the kingdom, teaching the people, and disputing with the religious authorities. In turn, he sets his face towards Jerusalem and begins to waste no time getting there though he knows when he gets there he will be put to death. Well, along the way his conflict with the religious authorities escalates from simple disputation about him being the Messiah to them wanting to kill him. His signs drop off to just a handful more. He stops teaching the people and begins to focus his teaching on his disciples teaching them about what it is to follow him. Their surprise, again and again he tells them that when he gets to Jerusalem he will be handed over to the religious authorities and suffer greatly only to be put to death but on the

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third day he will rise. He tells them all of this in an attempt to disillusion them. He is just trying to get them to understand that since he is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, the one through whom God is establishing his reign and putting the world to right, since he is the Christ, in accordance with Scripture he will have to die and be resurrected. You see, the true enemies are sin and death and his death and being raised is the only way to end them.

As we read this morning, Peter pulls the big wait a minute. Even though he recognizes who Jesus is he has illusions about what Jesus has come to do. “God be merciful to you, Lord! This shall never happen to you!” he says. The source of Peter’s illusion is that he is thinking the things of men rather than the things of God. I say men because it was men who invented this illusion. Peter like everybody else back then only knew the myths about the Messiah not what the prophets of old had really said. His illusion is that the Christ, the Messiah, is going to walk into Jerusalem and with one cataclysmic swoop of the hand of God he’ll call down the angels of God who will drive out the Romans and cleanse the nation of its corrupt leaders. Then Jesus will establish the kingdom of God and be anointed king of Israel forever. Like I said, this is an illusion. Peter actually thinks he’s thinking the things of God. He’s so sure of the myths about the Messiah that he pulls Jesus aside to set him straight saying the dying and rising stuff just isn’t going to happen.

Then comes Jesus’ haunting rebuke of Peter. “Get behind me Satan! You are a stumbling block to me.” Basically, what Jesus is saying is that Satan is using Peter to tempt Jesus to sin, to use his power and authority to serve himself rather than do the Father’s will. We really need to get the full magnitude of the inner struggle Jesus is wrestling with here particularly concerning the suffering and dying part. If you remember this struggle was what the episode of Jesus praying and sweating blood in the Garden of Gethsemane was all about. “Father take this cup from me.” He begs. Peter’s rebuke of him was a real temptation to Jesus because there was some truth there. As the Son of God he didn’t have to die. He had the authority to call down the angels of heaven and bring in the kingdom in mythical fashion. But...the moment he did he would have sinned. He would have transgressed the Father’s will and the consequences are unimaginable.

Then after this rebuke Jesus turns to all the disciples and very blatantly defines discipleship for them and it is a far cry from what we call being a follower of Jesus. We seem to think that faith is just believing in God and knowing that we’ve got God in our pocket because he loves us and wants to meet our needs and that faithfulness is nothing more than coming to church on Sunday and being a good person hoping we’ll go to heaven when we die because we believe the right stuff about Jesus. For the most part, for us, discipleship is simply trying to find a way to fit God into our lives and it really doesn’t have much to do with Jesus. We can talk about believing in God without ever having to mention Jesus. To them and to us Jesus says if anyone wants to be his follower, they must renounce any claim they think they have upon their own lives and pick up their own hanging stake and follow him. To be his follower is to share in his mission of confronting the powers in order to bring justice and peace into this world as the sign of God’s in-breaking reign and to do so even if it means we wind up poor or even dying for him. He says if we try to save our own life or soul which is the entirety of “who I am as a person before God”, we will only lose our life. We’ll lose the entirety of who I am as a person before God. But, then he says if we lose our lives for his sake, which is to let your life be completely in God’s hands then, “Eureka!” Your new life hidden by God in Christ begins to take shape now and will grow to its fullness in the day of resurrection when we see Christ face to face.

I’ll say it like this, anyone who claims to know Jesus and who he is and what he has come to do will have a life that is utterly in vain and bereft of meaning before God if that

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person doesn't lay it all out for God's purposes their life. To bring in a little Ten Commandments here, using the Lord's name in vain isn't simply a matter of cussing; it is claiming the name of Jesus for ourselves and then not following in his mission of confronting the powers by working for justice and peace in this world, working to establish true human community that is indeed a praise to God. To be a Christian today is to walk out into this world of materialism, consumerism, greed and power lust and say “in the name of Jesus Christ I will not live like this because it dehumanizes, destroys people.” To be a Christian today isn't just to sit back and say I'm going to try to be as morally upright as I can and hope I'll go to heaven when I die. That, my friends, is the illusion of faith. Rather, to be Jesus' disciple is to invest your life, indeed and if applicable your retirement account in the equity of establishing equitable and just community wherever Jesus leads you to do it. Probably the greatest statement of faith we rich Christians can make is that “I will trust God to provide for me in my old age and stop trying to provide for ourselves.” To be his disciple is to advocate for the voiceless, to support those whom our greed has made unable to support themselves. It is to give home to those who have no home. The prophet Micah says it best, “He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

Jesus really puts it like it is. What good is it to gain the world, but loose your soul, your relatedness to God, in the process? Or, what can you give in exchange for a life that is not vain in God's eyes, a soul-filled life. Are you feeling disillusioned yet? I thought about trying an old revivalism trick and ask you to close your eyes and bow your heads and say, “Now with every eye closed and every head bowed any of you folks who know Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, who know he is the Con of the Living God through whom God is bringing in his reign and putting the world to right, those of you who know Jesus, of you I want those who will go the full Monty of renouncing claim to your lives and picking up your own hanging stick and following him, those of you who will do that, I want you to raise your hands.” I won't do that, but the question sticks. That, my friends, is the disillusion of faith. I have to speak for myself and say I fail miserably. Nevertheless, amen.