

Sunday, August 30, 2026

Proper 17A; 14th Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 16:21-28

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

Introduction: The Reign of Christ is Cruciform

My friends,
 Today's Gospel reading
 comes immediately
 after last week.
 Last Sunday,
 Peter confessed,
 "You are the Christ,
 the Son of the Living God."
 Now,
 Jesus explains
 what that confession means.

The Christ,
 the Son of the Living God,
 rules from the cross.
 Peter will see the Son of Man
 coming in His Kingdom.
 He will see Him raised up,
 high and exalted,
 in the humiliation of the cross.

But Peter expected something else.
 Peter expected the Christ
 to come in glory.
 The kingdom
 to arrive by power,
 victorious battle.
 Earthly triumph.
 Not the unbearable shame
 of suffering and death.
Especially death
 on the cross.

Peter cannot reconcile “Christ” with “cross.”

But Jesus will not permit Peter
—or us—
to separate them.

The reign of Christ is cruciform.
The King rules
through the cross.
The Kingdom comes
through the cross.
Those who follow the King
walk the way
of the cross.
The Kingdom spreads
by the way
of the cross.

St. Peter has confessed the right Christ,
but he has the wrong idea
about what the Christ
has come to do.

I. The Kingdom Comes by the Cross

My friends,
St. Peter expects the truth
of his confession
to be manifested
in glory
and power.
*“You are the Christ,
the Son of the living God.”* (Matthew 16:1).
Peter’s confession is true.
But His expectation is wrong.

He hears “Christ” and thinks:

- victory
- glory
- power
- triumph
- Israel’s visible, political restoration.

He does **not** expect:

- Suffering
- rejection
- a hidden kingdom
- death
- a cross.

After 2,000 years of Christianity,
 our understanding
 of the cross has changed.
 But for the first century—
 it was the deepest shame.
 Unfathomably lowly disgrace.
 After 2000 years of Christian teaching,
 our understanding of pride has changed.
 We give the side-eye
 to egotistical blowhards.
 But the ancient heroes?
 Boastful braggarts don't even come close.
 Yet they were **heroes**.
 Looked up to.
 Honoured.

Christ's words are beyond shocking.
 Beyond counter-cultural.
 They're mind-breaking.

*“From that time
 Jesus began
 to show His disciples
 that He **must** go
 to Jerusalem
 and suffer many things
 from the elders
 and chief priests
 and scribes,
 and be killed,
 and on the third day be raised.”* (Matthew 16:21)
 That word “**must**” is crucial.
 The cross is not an unfortunate interruption
 of Christ's mission.
 It's not even a bump
 along the way.

The cross is the whole point.
 The cross **is** Christ's mission.
 He **MUST** be killed.
 Jesus goes
 to the cross
 according to the Father's saving will.

Jesus,
 as the Christ,
 brings His Kingdom
 through the cross.
 Jesus is the King.
 But
 His throne is the cross.
 His crown is thorns.
 His victory is shameful defeat.
 His life comes
 through His death.

Why must the Christ die?
 Why must He die humiliated?

Because sinners need more
 than politics.
 More than an example.
 They need a Saviour.
 Christ goes
 to the cross
 for sinners.
 He bears the terrible shame
 of our sin.
 He bears the suffering
 and pain
 we deserve.
 He receives our judgment
 and our death.
 He gives Himself
 as a ransom
 for sinners.

He goes to the cross
 for you.
 In your place.

The cross is not merely
an **example**
of courage
or sacrifice.
Jesus does not merely go
to the cross
to **show** us
how to suffer.
Jesus goes to the cross
to suffer
for us.
Jesus goes to defeat sin
and death
for us.

Jesus says
the Son of Man must
“on the third day be raised.”
Jesus dies
so there can be resurrection.
The cross is not defeat.
Christ’s resurrection proclaims
God’s acceptance
of His sacrifice.
The Crucified King
is the Risen King.

And therefore
His Kingdom rests
not on our success,
but on His finished work.

And now,
Jesus turns
from what He must do
to what His disciples must do.
First comes Christ’s cross.

Then comes our cross-bearing.

II. The Kingdom Spreads by the Cross

My friends,
 Jesus says to Peter,
*“Get behind me,
 Satan!
 You are a hindrance to me.
 For you are not setting your mind
 on the things
 of God,
 but on the things
 of man.”* (Matthew 16:23)

The things of man do not spread the Kingdom.

Peter wants
 to establish a kingdom
 through power,
 glory,
 victory,
 success,
 and the avoidance of suffering.
 Jesus calls these
 “the things of man.”

We are tempted
 to do the same
 with outreach
 and evangelism.
 We may expect the Church
 to grow through:

- impressive programs
- polished appearances
- perfect testimonies
- slick musical performances
- celebrity
- political power
- cultural influence

But Christ establishes His Kingdom
 through His Word.
 And that Word is centred
 on the crucified Christ.

As St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

*“I decided
to know nothing
among you
except Jesus Christ
and Him crucified...
so that
your faith might not rest
in the wisdom
of men
but
in the power
of God.”* (1 Corinthians 2:2-5)

We sometimes forget
that the Church is like her Lord.
We expect God’s kingdom to look like:

- impressive numbers
- perfect-looking families
- victorious Christian living
- visible success
- prosperity
- power
- health
- comfort
- life without defeat and suffering.

We begin to think:

“if God is blessing me,
everything should be well.”

or

“If the Church is faithful,
it should be successful
by worldly measures.”

But the cross tells us otherwise.

**The Church’s glory is hidden
in the cross.**

Peter had just confessed,
*"You are the Christ,
 the Son of the living God."*
 Now Jesus shows Peter
 what kind of Christ He is.
 Christ is the ransom
 for many.
 And that Confession must continue.

The Kingdom spreads
 when Christians confess
 Christ crucified
 and risen
 for sinners.
 We confess this
 with our tongues.
 We confess this
 with our lives.
 We confess this
 by carrying the cross.

Evangelism is not,
 "look how successful my life is."
 Evangelism is
 "I am a sinner.
 Christ is my Saviour.
 He has forgiven me.
 He forgives you."

*"Then Jesus told His disciples,
 'If anyone would come
 after Me,
 let him deny himself
 and take up his cross
 and follow Me.' (Matthew 16:24).
 Confessing the cross can be costly.
 Our cross-bearing itself does not save anyone.
 But it accompanies our confession
 of the Christ.
 It carries His Word
 into the brokenness
 in this world.*

There are times
when staying silent
would be easier.
But instead,
you speak,
and carry the cross
into the conversation.
Someone expects you
to retaliate in anger.
But instead,
you forgive,
and carry the cross
into the relationship.
You want to be accepted.
But instead,
you refuse
to compromise God's word,
and bear the cross
into the jeering crowd.

You endure suffering,
without abandoning Christ.
You cling to Him,
even when the world
thinks you're foolish.
And then someone asks,
"Why do you live this way?"
Now you have the opportunity
to say,
"Because Christ has been merciful
to me."

Bearing the cross points
away from the Christian
and towards Christ.
The purpose is never,
"Look how much I sacrifice for Jesus."
That is not denying self.
That is full
of self.
Bearing the cross highlights
"how much **Christ** suffered
for me."

Our lives become a confession.
 A confession
 that God brings life
 to the dead.
 And righteousness
 to sinners.

Christ established His Kingdom
 through His death
 and resurrection.
 Our willingness
 to suffer
 rather than deny Him
 bears witness
 to the reality
 of that Kingdom.
 And our words explain.
 “Christ died for sinners.
 I am one of them.
 And He has forgiven me.”

III. The Kingdom Gives Life by the Cross

My friends,
 The world says,
 “save your life.”
 Jesus says,
 *“For whoever would save his life
 will lose it,
 but whoever loses his life
 for My sake
 will find it.”* (Matthew 16:25)

The world says

- protect yourself
- preserve yourself
- advance yourself
- treat yourself
- find yourself
- make yourself comfortable
- build your identity
- avoid sacrifice
- get as much as you can from life.

But

Jesus says
 this attempt
 to save yourself
 ultimately fails.
 It doesn't work.
"Whoever would save his life will lose it."

Paradoxically,

life is kept
 by losing it.
 We live
 by dying.
 We gain
 by giving away.

We are exalted
 by being humbled.
 We receive
 by faith,
 not
 by achieving.
 We find life
 by losing our life
 in Christ.

We carry the cross.

We are crucified
 with Him.
 And dying
 with Him,
 we are raised
 with Him.

Romans chapter six says:

*"Or don't you know
 that all of us
 who were baptized
 into Christ Jesus
 were baptized
 into His death?"*

*We were
 therefore
 buried
 with Him
 through baptism
 into death
 in order that,
 just as Christ was raised
 from the dead
 through the glory
 of the Father,
 we too
 may live a new life.
 If we have been united
 with Him
 like this
 in His death,
 we will certainly also
 be united
 with Him
 in His resurrection.”*

Bearing the cross
 and dying
 is the life
 of the baptized.
 It's the dying the death
 of repentance.
 The old Adam,
 the sinful nature,
 being crucified daily.
 Drowned daily
 in your baptism.
 And the new nature—
 the new life—
 rising daily
 in Christ.

Daily repentance
and faith
mean returning
to that baptismal death
and resurrection
again and again.
And finally rising forever
on the last day.

Only Jesus lives
if you are dead.
The old Adam must die.
The Christian life is not
about making ourselves better
so Jesus can help us.
It's not making ourselves better
so Jesus can use us.
It's dying
so Christ can live
in us.
We die,
so that Christ can raise us
to new life.

IV. The Kingdom Gains by the Cross

My friends,
Jesus asks,
*“For what will it profit a man,
if he gains the whole world
and forfeits his soul?”*

The world's definition
of gain
is temporary.
You can have everything
this world
can offer.
But it won't avail you
in the end.
Hearse's don't have trailers.

You can gain:

- Money
- reputation
- comfort
- health
- happiness
- possessions
- influence
- trophies

And still lose everything.

There is no partying in hell.

The Bible says,

*“the world is passing away
along with its desires,
but whoever does God’s will
abides forever.”* (1 John 2:17)

Christ gives

what the world cannot give.

- Forgiveness
- reconciliation with God
- righteousness
- adoption into God’s family
- resurrection
- eternal life.

The Christian may lose much

according to

worldly accounting.

He may look like the biggest,
most shameful loser.

But the Christian cannot lose Christ.

And having Christ,
the Christian has everything
that finally matters.

Therefore,

don’t measure your life
by worldly appearances.

Don't measure God's Kingdom—
 the Church—
 by worldly appearances.
 A faithful Christian life
 may not look impressive.
 A faithful congregation
 may not look powerful.
 It may not be the one with a full parking lot.
 Faithfulness will involve suffering
 and weakness.
 Obedience may cost you something.
 Love will require sacrifice.
 Confessing Christ may make you unpopular.

But none of that means
 Christ has abandoned His Kingdom.
 The cross is precisely
 where the King
 has chosen
 to reign.

Conclusion: There Is No Life Apart from Christ's Cross

My friends,
 There is no life
 apart from Christ.
 And there is no life
 in Christ
 apart from
 dying
 and rising
 with Him.

St. Peter wanted a cross-less Christ.
 We, too, are tempted
 to want Christianity
 without a cross.
 But there is no Christ
 without the cross.
 And there is no discipleship,
 no Christian,
 without a cross.

Christ went to the cross
for you.
He bore the shame
you could never bear.
He carried the sin
you could never pay for.
He died the death
you deserved.
He rose
from the grave.
And now He calls you
to follow Him.
He calls you
to come and die.
So deny yourself.
Take up your cross.
Follow Him.

But not to earn His love.
You already have His love.
Not to earn salvation.
He has already won your salvation.

Follow Him,
because the crucified
and risen King
has made you His own.
And the King
who was raised
from the dead
will raise you also.

*The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
amen.*