

**August 30, 2020**

In last week's Gospel lesson, Jesus asks his disciples, "who do you say that I am," and Peter makes the confession, "you are the Messiah, the Son of the living God," to which Jesus responds "you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church." And this week, only five verses later, Jesus is responding to Peter by saying "Get behind me, Satan!"

Wow, if you ever need a good example of a saint and sinner; Peter's our man; he is the rock of the church, and Satan all at the same time.

These last few lessons from the Gospel of Matthew reveal the identity of Jesus, and the mission of Jesus. Our lesson says, "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." This is Jesus' mission statement in a nut shell.

Did you catch the word "must?" This is not an option... What is this "must" all about? Why "must" Jesus go and be killed and be raised? There is a lot of rubber hitting the road here; let's do a little reflecting with this "must."

Quick Story... I have two brothers and one sister, we all married about the same time, we all started families about the same time. And so, we created quite a pile of cousins-- all about the same age. All five of the little boy cousins, including Jon, were all great pals, but boy they could get into it!

And every year we'd go on a big fishing trip up to Leech lake. It was fun, but talk about exhausting!!

If Jon caught a fish with a yellow spinner, then the four other boys would need a yellow spinner. If Jon caught a fish with the red spinner, then suddenly everybody would need a red spinner...

If Jon caught a 20-inch walleye, then Bob caught a 21-inch walleye...

Does this sound familiar? Then imagine all five of them with all kinds of fishing gear! Rods and reels... Bobbers and sinkers... Leaches and minnows... Plugs, spoons and spinners! Every kid had to have what the next kid had! And constantly changing... Constant rivalry... Uffda, it was a three-ring circus! And there was often hurt feelings...

The big word for this rivalry and conflict is mimesis. From the word mime, which means to imitate. We imitate each other's wants... In the bible it's called covetousness. It's the ninth and tenth commandments-- thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, spouse, donkeys, possessions, whatever and everything!

In our everyday language, it's just called keeping up with the Jones...

And it's not only material things that we desire. We desire to be like other people. I'd love to be like Brad Paisley... I have this love / hate thing with Brad Paisley, I love how he plays guitar, and I'm jealous that I'm not him... And he must get that a lot, because as one of his songs says, "When your celebrity, it's audios reality."

Think about how fashions come and go. And politics! We all desire certain parties and candidates. And lucky us, we're in an election year, guess what? Rivalry and conflict...

We are creatures of desire; we are like little boys squabbling over fishing stuff. It's the human condition; constantly locked in desire, jealousy, rivalry, and conflict...

The Old Testament, is one story after another of this very same human pattern... Adam and Eve want to be like God, knowing good and evil, leading to the fall... Cain murdering Able, because he was jealous of the blessing... Sarai and Hagar, jealous about the heir... Jacob and Esau, jealous about the blessing... Joseph and his brothers, jealous about the coat... David and Uriah, David schemed to have Uriah killed so he could have Bathsheba... Israel and Babylon... It just goes on and on...

And so, now, here is the crux of the matter-- why **must** Jesus die. Well, some contemporary Theologians suggest that Jesus saw his mission to be killed, exactly because of this human nature—in our hearts we are jealous and murderous people. And only through the death of Jesus are we given a mirror that reveals our true hearts, our true colors.

And when we see our own jealous / murderous tendencies for what they are, self-awareness happens, transformation happens. Jesus gives us a way out of our jealousies, rivalries and violence.

The good news this morning is that Jesus did go to the cross and exactly through the cross there is transformation. Jesus says, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." This is an absolutely remarkable statement; Jesus is utilizing the power of "desire" to achieve the absolute opposite result. Jesus takes the covetousness that leads to jealousy and conflict, and turns it into the covetousness that leads to love...

Jesus created a model for us to follow, and not only to follow, but to desire. When we want to be like Jesus, change happens... This is a complete reprogramming of who we are...

Do you see the direction of this transformation? Rather than sacrificing someone else to get what we want; we sacrifice ourselves to love the neighbor. Rather than wanting stuff that ends with rivalry and conflict, we want to be like Jesus, and bring healing, right relationship and reconciliation.

Rather than point our fingers at others, we point them at ourselves, and learn to love our enemies. This is why Jesus **must** go to the cross; this is the transformation God is creating.

And I stand here today to give witness to that transformation. As I go out visiting, and through all our meetings and fellowship, I see Christ in so many hearts; hearts of wisdom, hearts of graciousness, and hearts of love. Through the cross, God is creating something powerfully new, right here, right now, on earth as it is in heaven. With every act of love and kindness...

And frankly, I believe it, because I've seen it... And so, have you... Amen.