



FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

“NO FINE PRINT”

Scripture Lessons: Joshua 24:1, 14-24; Matthew 16:13-24

*This sermon was preached by Dr. L. Holton Siegling, Jr. on Sunday, June 16, 2019
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Matthew 16:13-24

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’ And they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’ And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.’ Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

From that time on, 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. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, ‘God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.’ But he turned and said to Peter, ‘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.’

Then Jesus told his disciples, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

Let us pray...

Almighty and Everlasting God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be pleasing, acceptable, and even joyful in your sight, for you are our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

Headed into this Father’s Day weekend, I found myself reflecting upon certain experiences that I have had with the fathers in my own life. For example, my grandfather used to take us as

grandchildren, once a quarter, to the old First Federal Savings Bank where we would get the interest printed in our Squirrel's Club Passbook Savings Accounts. Then he would take us all to get some ice-cream. As grandchildren, we had a name for that quarterly ice-cream visit – we called it the “Meet the Manager Game” because, inevitably, when we would sit down, either the music was too loud or the temperature was too low...something was just not quite right, and so granddad would always make it a point to talk to the manager.

Not surprising his son, my father, also learned how to play that game rather well. I remember the time my sister, Helen Ann, accompanied my father to a car dealership in order to learn –as we all learned – the fine art of buying a car. And for my dad, the process started well before they arrived at the dealership. My father not only made it a point to dress down for the occasion, but, as I recall, he also borrowed a car from an extended family member, one that was not as good a shape as his own. He and Helen Ann even knew the specific car they wanted to buy – a grey Chevy Nova, probably no more than 150 years old, give or take.

They played it cool though...walking around the car lot with the salesman until they just happened to come across that Nova. The salesman continued to usher them toward a few other cars; yet, still, in a non-comital, nonchalant kind of way, they kept coming back to the Nova. Before long, the negotiations were underway. Several times the salesman went inside to talk with his manager. Pretty soon they had come to a verbal agreement, and they proceeded to go inside and seal the deal. Behind a nice large wooden desk sat the salesman and he proceeded to push forms across the table to have them signed by my father.

Helen Ann remembers well one of those forms – it had to do with the car's air-conditioning. Apparently, it needed to be recharged and there was a small fee for the Freon. To make a long story short, before too long, Dad and Helen Ann were playing the “Meet the Manager Game.” Dad was quick to point out that they had agreed upon a price and that the Freon should be included without cost, to which the manager kindly responded that it was only a minimal fee. In a kindly but firm tone of voice, my father testified to his general posture toward any and all extra fees in life by simply saying: “I'm not buying a coke.” At that moment, and by her own admission, Helen Ann's hopes of owning that grey Chevy Nova came crashing to the ground.

You see, as far as my father was concerned, there were going to be no negotiations from that point forward. Thank goodness the dealership threw in that Freon at no extra cost, otherwise, Helen Ann would have had to go through yet another car buying experience with my father, and believe me, one was certainly enough.

Hidden fees and fine print – they will get you every time if you are not careful. That's what that speedy little voice at the end of commercials is all about – it is the one that tells us about blackout dates and limited warranties. Hidden fees, fine print, that is, after all, the stuff of life: but, friends, that is not the stuff of God, because, when it comes to following Jesus Christ our Lord, there is no fine print; there are no hidden fees; there is no disclaimer.

Throughout the Bible, God is any number of things, but one thing God is not - is ambiguous. God never leaves us wondering who it is that we are called to serve and what it means for us to do so. In our New Testament Lesson this morning, Jesus asks the question: “Who do you say that I am?” In other words, others may say certain things about Jesus, and some may be right

and some may be wrong - but you, Peter, you who are very near the kingdom of God inasmuch as Christ is in your presence, "Who do you say that I am?"

Perhaps we, like Peter, having witnessed the fullness of Christ's ministry, and having heard that the world considers him to be little more than a prophet, we too intend to set the record straight, don't we. You are not some prophet – you are not just a healer, extraordinaire...you are the Messiah! And like a poker player who needs not hide his or her emotions any longer, we proudly throw our cards down on the table, because we know that this is a hand that cannot be beaten!

Oh, praise be to God, we know that Jesus is the Messiah; but more than that, we believe that statement to be true, for we have seen who Jesus is and that for which he stands. We have seen the full range of human emotions which testify to Jesus being human like all of us as he cries over the death of his friend Lazarus, as his passion burns while turning over the tables of the money changers; we see it as he shows compassion to the woman caught in the act of adultery. We have witnessed the authority with which Jesus lived his life...an authority which bears witness to another powerful reality, which is that Jesus is also God – we see this as he heals the sick, as he raises the dead, as he multiplies the loaves and the fish; we see it as he provides life and life abundant to all those who would call him Lord.

And so Peter says, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Imagine how Peter must have felt to get that confession out in the open. Surely, now would be time for Jesus to transform the status quo – surely now Jesus would rush headlong into Jerusalem and make those occupying Roman forces shake in their proverbial boots. Ah, but Jesus' idea of being the Messiah is radically different from Peter's'.

And about his messianic mission - there will be no misunderstanding. There will be no mystery about the person and work of Jesus Christ for as the old hymn goes: "For not with swords loud clashing, nor roll of stirring drums; with deeds of love and mercy the heavenly kingdom comes." And surely Peter should have known this; he should have taken Jesus at his word when he spoke about the great suffering he would soon endure. Instead, Peter pulls Jesus aside and essentially rebukes him. Peter must have felt quite certain that Jesus had lost his way, that Jesus had somehow missed the memo regarding what it meant to be a good Messiah.

In today's New Testament Lesson, Jesus removes any ambiguity as to what it means to truly follow him. When Peter says, "You are the Messiah," Jesus responds by saying, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church."

We would do well to notice that seldom if ever does a profession of faith exist apart from a call to follow. Which is to say that, at some point, our profession of faith must become a vocation of faith! And this is so important for us to hear, because, for having heard it, we simply cannot say at some later date that we didn't know what we were getting ourselves into. Jesus said it as plain as day: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

Our Parramore preacher from last year, Will Willimon, he reminds us that we live in a world that always wants the new and glittery thing. We want our Christianity to be flashy and proud and successful and prosperous. But the Bible reminds us that the way of Jesus is not always flashy...and there's certainly nothing glamorous about the cross. And yet, in the upside down logic of God's kingdom, life comes through downward mobility, through self-denial and sacrifice...even suffering.

Jesus knew exactly what it meant to be the Messiah; it was Peter who was clueless. Peter just couldn't fathom that this unbeatable hand that he had placed on the table would actually have to lose in order to win. Oh, I imagine that, if it were left up to us to determine what it means to call Jesus Lord, that we, like Peter, would have all kinds of ideas and opinions - but Jesus leaves nothing to chance! Following Jesus is not something to be taken lightly - for it is not only costly, but it is also dangerous!

In his famous book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it like this: "Cheap grace means grace as bargain basement goods, cut-rate forgiveness, cut-rate comfort, cut-rate sacrament, [it means] Grace as the church's inexhaustible pantry from which [God's goodness] is poured out without hesitation or limit." Bonhoeffer goes on to say, however, that "costly grace" is the Gospel. It is the Gospel which must be sought again and again and again. It is costly because it costs people their lives; [but] it is grace because it gives people their lives" (Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*, SCM Press, 1948, pp. 43-45).

To be certain, the invitation to discipleship is forever before us, and so is that question: "Who do you say that I am?" And God beckons us to answer the question in our following. And in our following, we know that we need to leave our old life behind, this is not a surprise; and, while we can quite easily come to terms with the newness of life that Christ brings, this idea of a cross...well, the cross is an entirely different story. And lest we think of the cross as only a particular pain to bear, tomorrow marks the 4th anniversary of the shooting at the Emanuel AME Church up on Calhoun Street.

Since returning to Charleston, I have enjoyed getting to know some of our fellow pastors. One of them is Anthony Thompson. His wife was one of the nine people who was shot that day at their Bible study; she was killed. At last night's premier of the "Emanuel" documentary at the Gaillard, Anthony and other family members of the victims told their stories. And part of their story that speaks to the power of God's love, which in Jesus Christ looked down from that cross and said: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." It was made manifest in their life and of all places, a courtroom, where Anthony and many loved ones of the deceased, they did what so many people couldn't fathom, for in their grief, on their cross - they offered grace; they offered forgiveness.

In CS Lewis', *The Silver Chair*, we find a dialogue between the girl, Jill, and Aslan, the lion. "'Are you thirsty?'" said the lion. "'I'm dying of thirst,'" said Jill. "'Then drink,'" said the lion. "'May I? Would you mind going away while I do?'" As Jill gazed at his motionless bulk, she realized that she might as well have asked a mountain to move aside for her convenience.

The delicious rippling noise of the stream was driving her nearly frantic. “Will you promise not to do anything to me, if I do come?” said Jill. “I make no promises,” said the lion. Jill was so thirsty now that, without noticing it, she had come a step closer. “Do you eat girls?” she asked. “I’ve swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms,” said the lion. The lion didn’t say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. He just said it. “I dare not come and drink,” said the girl. “Then you will die of thirst,” said the lion. “Oh dear!” said Jill. “I suppose I must go and look for another stream then.” To which the lion replied: “There is no other stream” (Walter Hooper, ed, C.S. Lewis: Readings for Meditation and Reflection, Harper Collins Publishers, 1992, p. 1)

That is the point, dear friends, there is no fine print; there are no disclaimers of any kind; there is no other stream! Jesus is the Messiah, and we are his children. And we are the ones who, by God’s grace, continue to build Christ’s church, and we are called to do this even at the risk of losing our life.

But we won’t. Not in the end! For the one who has the power to build and overthrow has determined to give us life and to give it to us abundantly. God has also determined to share with us the gift of the church – the bride of Christ – and though there will be times when even she faces struggles and opposition...we know and believe that even the gates of hell will not prevail against her. And that dear friends, is the gospel. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**The following sermon has not been edited by the author; therefore, there may be discrepancies. When in doubt please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website.*