

"Rethinking Necessary"

Text: Matthew 16:21-26

May our all-powerful God, who is faithful to supply every needed blessing, shower each of you with his grace and peace. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

The turmoil currently engulfing the planet in connection with the latest flu bug is actually not all bad. Some is of course challenging, but it's not all bad. In fact the current situation offers us some very valuable and positive lessons – lessons we might not have learned any other way. One of the greatest lessons is learning to redefine "necessary" and "essential." Take a mental stroll through your world (or actually do it when you get home) and look at each item, each activity, asking yourself, *honestly*, is this essential? Could I get along without it? Think of everything you do in the course of an average week. Necessary or not really?

It takes brutal honesty, but what you will find is that the vast majority of what we own and what we do is unnecessary, non-essential. We need clothes and shoes, but not nearly as much as we currently own. We could survive without microwaves, most of our dishes, all of our televisions, exercise equipment, and decorations, all or nearly all of our furniture, even (gasp) our phones. We don't need to eat out, go to movies, or watch sporting events. The boat and the camper could go, nearly all of our books and magazines, and pretty much everything that hangs on our walls. In fact when it comes right down to it, we really don't *need* all that much simply to survive. (Guns and tools, by the way, are essential. That's non-negotiable.)

Interestingly enough, some have tried to do the same with the Christian religion. They have attempted to walk through God's Word and identify which doctrines or teachings are essential and which are not. Not only is that a most perilous venture, I can't, for the life of me, identify any good purpose or positive result. Don't misunderstand. I know *why* some do this; it's just not good. They are trying to identify how many things in God's Word they can safely ignore and still go to heaven. While it is certainly true that **"whoever believes and is baptized will be saved,"** what true child of God could ever rightly regard *anything* that God has told us in his Word as optional or non-essential? God himself has already done that. There are many things he left up to Christian judgment – styles, customs, diet, how often we commune, etc. Nothing that he did tell us in his Word is therefore unnecessary or optional. In fact in our text for this morning our

Savior himself demonstrates the importance of acknowledging that some things in life are absolutely *necessary*.

The text that will guide and instruct us this morning is found recorded in the 16th Chapter Matthew's Gospel:

^{ESV} **Matthew 16:21-26** *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. ²² And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall 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 not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." ²⁴ ¶ Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?"*

These are the very words of the One True God, who alone has the right to dictate to every single man, woman, and child both what is good and what is evil, what is necessary and what is not. We thank our God for these holy words, and we now ask him to teach and instruct us through his Word with this prayer: **"Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth."** Amen.

Before we get back to the necessity or "must" identified by Jesus in our text, let me ask you a question. Who was or is the worst, most despicable and most loathsome person you have ever known? I'm sure you've all met some pretty sorry characters in your life, but who would you categorize as the worst of the worst? The answer, interestingly enough, is that you all know who I'm talking about. You've all met him; in fact you know him well – where he lives, what he does, how he thinks. The worst of the worst is me. The worst of the worst is you. What is more, unless and until we come to terms with this stark reality we will never fully appreciate Jesus Christ and what he did for us.

We're talking of course about the old Adam that lives within each of us – that sinful nature that every single human being harbors until the moment of his death. The problem here is that we seem to have developed a ridiculously inaccurate idea of just what our own personal old Adam is really like. Oh we give lip service to the truth from time to

time when we talk about that "bad side," but I wonder just how often we actually do an honest evaluation. The results are quite intimidating – frightening even.

Our text is meant to serve as the perfect mirror by which we gain a truly accurate view of just how bad things really are in our own natural human hearts. There we are not supposed to see *Peter* taking Jesus aside; we are to see *ourselves* doing so. Note first just how considerate we are. Not wanting to correct the Son of God in front of the rest of his students, we politely and discreetly lead him off to the side to a quiet spot and there attempt to set him straight with this message: "*I will not permit you to go to Jerusalem to suffer and die for my sins.*"

What exactly is the underlying thought here? Surely the intentions are good even if the counsel is not.

Actually this is just the sort of nonsense that we have become so good at believing and promoting – a perfect example of our own pious self-delusion. It can be especially difficult for Christians, who of course are made up of both old Adam and new man. Here's a general rule of thumb: *If you believe that your old Adam is in any way well-meaning and well-motivated, you are being tragically delusional.* Our old Adam, just like Peter's in our text, is an ally of Satan himself. Worse still, our old Adam really doesn't believe that Jesus *needed* to suffer and die for our sins. That thoroughly wicked part of us doesn't believe sin is all that bad. That part believes that life here on earth is what it's all about, therefore to actually *suffer and die*, and thereby to give up all that this life has to offer, is just idiotic and irrational. If this world is all, then nothing could be worth dying for, because death is as far as our old Adam will ever see.

Only we don't style it that way, do we? We find it a bit hard to really condemn Peter's actions in our text, or to ascribe evil intentions. We're just lying to ourselves. Jesus of course saw right through it. That's why he called Peter out and labeled him as an instrument of the devil himself. That's exactly what *we* are *whenever we follow the impulses of our sinful flesh*. His message to Peter, to the rest of the disciples, and therefore also to each of us: "*Learn to be honest with yourselves. Open your eyes to the way things really are, not only out in the sinful world but within you.*"

What exactly was Jesus communicating to us in our text when he said, "***If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me***"? He was identifying an immutable necessity – an essential truth: *we cannot follow Jesus and self (our sinful old Adam) at the same time.* It's just not possible, because the two are diametrically

opposed to each other. He is not demanding some good work on our part if we are to be saved, he is communicating to us the way things are. We either deny self or we deny Jesus. It is just not possible to walk in opposite directions at the same time.

Paul wasn't exaggerating in Romans 7:18 when he said, "***I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.***" That means, among other things, that every time we follow the impulses of our sinful flesh we should look to this text and hear Jesus say to *us* exactly what he said 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.***"

This represents one of the necessities taught by Jesus in our text, but not the greatest one. Did you catch the greatest, most amazing "must" when you heard or read it? Did you stop to think about the incredibly profound truth that it communicated? Our text revealed it with these words: "***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.***"

Think about that. The necessity, the "must," is that Jesus had to go suffer and die in Jerusalem. Why *must* he? Why was he *obligated*? Why was that *necessary*? Human beings certainly had no power to impose our will upon God. No human being could fairly or reasonably demand it, since we just got done establishing our universal guilt and unworthiness. Satan couldn't demand it. How could he? God owes nothing to the devil. The only possible answer is that *God demanded it of himself*, and he demanded it of himself simply because you and I needed it – beyond desperately. Jesus himself had no sin of his own for which he needed to suffer. Jesus therefore bound *himself* with a "must" because of *our* great need, not his own. The Son of God thereby obligated himself to the selfless, self-sacrificing act that won our forgiveness and redemption. God didn't therefore place any "must" on us; he placed it on himself. Here we find the beating heart of the Christian faith. Just here we find that which separates Christianity from every other religion in existence. God obligated himself to fix our problem.

Some will undoubtedly argue: *But what about that other "must" in our text? Wasn't Jesus demanding something of us when he said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me"?*

Suppose you are trying to teach someone how to drive a car. One of the first things you tell them is not to drive two-footed. Why? Because you can't break and accelerate at the same time. Or suppose you buy a new grill and are reading through the instructions for the assembly and use of that new grill. Just as the purpose or goal of the directions was so that we could happily and safely enjoy their product, so also with Jesus' words here. Our Savior knew that following the dictates of our old Adam ("self") would result in unending torment in hell. How could it ever be construed as cruel or oppressive to warn and instruct us accordingly? The new man in us recognizes this, which is why we can honestly and wholeheartedly say with the Psalmist: **"Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day. ⁹⁸ Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me. ¹⁰³ How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! ¹⁰⁴ Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. ¹⁰⁵ Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."** (Psalm 119:97-98, 103-105) We use the law to crush our sinful flesh into submission every moment of every day, but that new man in us also delights in God's law as the perfect guide through life. Since we still have that old Adam, the Christian needs to be reminded that it is not possible to follow our sinful flesh and Jesus at the same time. The new man in us does not find that oppressive, just informative and helpful in the extreme. It does not groan under the burden of that news, it thrills to the clarity.

It is critically important that we learn to perpetually acknowledge our own personal wickedness, because then and only then will we rightly understand and appreciate the great necessity of Christianity - Jesus obligating himself to suffer and die for us. He knew exactly who and what he came to save. He was well aware of the evil that absolutely filled us from our mother's womb. He knew there was not one good or lovable or desirable thing in us, so he came to wash us clean - immaculately, perfectly, spotlessly clean in the eyes of our Creator God, which is where we now stand by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. It would, in the end, not have been remarkable for Jesus to come for that which was good and lovely. It is simply astounding, however, to recognize the love of Jesus Christ for our impossibly sinful human race, and how he obligated himself to secure our rescue. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Jeremiah 15:15-21** O LORD, you know; remember me and visit me, and take vengeance for me on my persecutors. In your forbearance take me not away; know that for your sake I bear reproach. ¹⁶ Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts. ¹⁷ I did not sit in the company of revelers, nor did I rejoice; I sat alone, because your hand was upon me, for you had filled me with indignation. ¹⁸ Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Will you be to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail? ¹⁹ Therefore thus says the LORD: "If you return, I will restore you, and you shall stand before me. If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall be as my mouth. They shall turn to you, but you shall not turn to them. ²⁰ And I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you to save you and deliver you, declares the LORD. ²¹ I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless."

^{ESV} **Romans 12:9-21** Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. ¹⁰ Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹ Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. ¹⁴ ¶ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. ¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." ²⁰ To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

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The 13th Sunday after Pentecost – August 30, 2020

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 226 (Stanzas 1-5) (Red Hymnal)

"Come, Oh, Come, Thou Quickening Spirit"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Jeremiah 15:15-21) How difficult for human beings – frail creatures of dust that we are – to remember during the hard times that our Lord sees and our Lord cares. It is tempting to seek out some special sin in our lives to help explain the cause of the hardship and, finding none, to regard God as unfair or careless. Yet God does not bind himself to our time-table, neither are we capable of knowing all that he knows. In the end, God's children *always* win; we are *always* delivered.

Psalm 23 (Supplement page 36) (Brown Hymnal)

The New Testament Lesson: (Romans 12:9-21) God's Word not only teaches us about the great "hereafter," it also gives rock-solid, practical advice and counsel concerning the "here and now." So also here the Holy Spirit through the pen of Paul gives us invaluable advice concerning our day-to-day activities and life. All, of course, is based not only on the example of Jesus, but on our desire to draw others through our actions to want to know their Savior as we do.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 746 (Brown Hymnal)

"Father Most Holy, Merciful and Tender"

The Sermon – Text: Matthew 16:21-26 (Printed on the back of this bulletin)

"Rethinking Necessary"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 453 (Stanzas 1-3) (Red Hymnal)

"We Are the Lord's"

The Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn - 453 (Stanza 4) (Red Hymnal)

"We Are the Lord's"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (28) Average (35)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
	-11:30 a.m.	– Bridal Shower for Hope Meyer
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – The Tri-Parish of La Crosse, Millston, and Fairchild have called Pastor Chad Seybt. Pastor Ben Libby is considering the calls to Redeemer of Bowdle and Zion of Ipswich. Pastor Luke Bernthal has returned the call to Living Savior or Eden Prairie. This year's Man-Up retreat has been postponed.

Man-Up Retreat – For reasons that are all too familiar by now, this year's Man-Up retreat has been postponed. More information will be forthcoming, but those who host the annual event are considering offering mini-courses that might be of interest, especially to men, on that weekend (September 24-26). If you have an idea for such a course, and especially if you would be willing to help produce it, please see Pastor Roehl.

Bridal Shower – A bridal shower is scheduled for Hope Meyer following the service this morning – hosted by Cindy Ollenburger and Angela Meyer. Timothy and Hope plan to reside in Bismarck for the coming year.

2021 Trip to Israel – Despite the current COVID-19 related challenges, the CLC trip to Israel is still on schedule for January 13-22, 2021. More information is available online at <https://tinyurl.com/IsraelTrip2021> or from the tour sponsor, Pastor Nathanael Mayhew (404-729-4602 or nnmayhew@sleepyeyelutheran.com). If you are considering going on this trip, please see Pastor Roehl.