

13th Sunday after Pentecost
August 30th, 2020

“Lost and Found!” (Matthew 16:25)
By Rev. Ed Weber

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,
Today’s text is from our Gospel reading, Matthew 16:25

“25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.”

Here ends our text.

Have you ever received a final inspection before leaving the house from someone in your family? You know, just to make sure everything looks okay and somewhat coordinates? You get an honest opinion from your spot checker and sometimes it will involve a direct to the point assessment like “Lose the hat!” or lose whatever else is sticking out like a sore thumb.

Sometimes our honest friends give some caring, and direct words of advice like “Lose the attitude”. You know, stop behaving rudely. Or, “Lose your ego”, start acting more humbly.

I. Whoever desires to save his life will lose it

Our epistle reading from today from Romans 12 gives Christians a list of “to do’s” and “not to do’s” from our ever present spot checker, God Himself.

“Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. 10 Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; 11 not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; 12 rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; 13 distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. 16 Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. 17 Repay no one evil for evil.”

In our modern-day language, God is telling us to lose the attitude, the ego, and associate with the humble. Give preference to one another. Wow! These are the thoughts of our compassionate, serving and merciful God, and not the thoughts of self-serving, me first, man!

Lose the indifference and help those in need. And the biggy...lose the hate, the vengeance and the animosity and bless people instead of cursing them.

How this sinful world needs to lose a lot of the anger that we see so often on the news. A little old lady who attended the final day of the RNC convention couldn't even cross the street without being frightened to death by people rushing up to her and yelling at her with obscene gestures. So called "peaceful protesters" believe it's perfectly ok to burn down businesses, loot stores, and maim and kill policemen.

God word doesn't say it's ok. God says to be kindly affectionate towards one another and repay no one evil for evil. Our epistle reading concludes with a strong directive, not opinion, from God. **"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."**

How this world needs to lose the rage in their hearts by repenting and receiving the love of Christ!!! How each of us need to daily repent of our sinful attitudes and actions and fall at the feet of Jesus asking for the mercy of God like the Canaanite woman! "Lord, have mercy on me!"

Yes, when Jesus does a spot check on our spiritual lives, He says that it doesn't just need a minor adjustment here and there. No, He says lose it all! A complete overhaul is needed.

"For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."

"Whoever" means each and every person on the face of this earth. It means you and me! Yes, each of us battles daily with our sinful flesh and our Gospel reading is directed not just to Peter, but to all of us to lose our life and find it only in Jesus!

You see, we can never completely lose the sinful nature, try as we may to self-correct ourselves. It's a pharisaical losing battle to think that we can fix ourselves and present ourselves holy and righteous before God. We would be hypocrites to believe that we don't need as much of God's mercy as those we see "peacefully protesting" on TV. Lose the hypocrisy.

In our Gospel, Jesus showed how serious our sin is when He told Peter, **“Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.” (Matthew 16:23)**

II. But whoever loses his life will find it in Jesus, who lost His life for all

Our sin is so serious that Jesus had to come down from heaven to fix us. He had to lose His life in order to win forgiveness for all of our sin stained lives. Yes, Jesus had to lose our sins at the cross and bury them there forever! That’s the pure Gospel. That’s the mind of our serving, loving God, who would lose His life so that we would find life in Him!

That’s the only way to heaven – through faith in Jesus! Jesus loved us so much that even though our covetous, lustful, vengeful, hateful lives weren’t worth saving, they were priceless in Jesus’ eyes.

“From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.” (Matthew 16:21)

He MUST go and suffer, killed and be raised on the third day. This is THE central message of the Bible, of Christianity. It is the Gospel. It is life. For when our lives come to an end because of the result of sin, then Jesus promises life, life with Him for all eternity.

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:23)

It is a free gift which man cannot gain or earn. **“For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.”**

If you believe that you can save your life by your own self-righteousness works you will fail miserably. You will lose your life for an eternity in hell! But whoever confesses his or her sin, repents of his or her life for Jesus sake, believing in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, will find it! It will be found in the saving water of your baptism! It will be found the Gospel promises of Jesus. **“He who believes and is baptized will be saved.” (Mark 16:16)**

In the verses right before our text that we heard last week, Jesus praised Peter’s confession of faith. On this rock Jesus will build His church and the gates of hell will not prevail!

We see why the rock was never Peter. Jesus called him Satan in our Gospel! Satan! An offense or stumbling rock, not THE Rock. Would Jesus build his church on the shifting, fence-straddling opinions of a sinful man? On a sinful man who would deny Him three times to preserve his life? No!

Peter denied the very reason for Jesus' coming. In the strongest words, Peter wanted to change God's plan of salvation.

“Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!” (Matthew 16:22)

Rebuke Jesus? Sinful man knows better than Jesus? Peter was basically saying, “I’ve got a better plan. Follow me!” No, Jesus was quick to put Peter in his place. There is only one plan of salvation to save your life and the lives of all people and it is by My death and resurrection! Everything else that denies this Gospel is satanic.

Yes, Peter. Get behind Me! Jesus said. Jesus is the leader! Put all your sinful self-righteous ideas and plans behind and follow Jesus!

“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.” (Matthew 16:24)

Deny self. Lose your life and be found in Jesus.

There's a TV program that's called “The Biggest Loser”. I haven't actually watched it, but from the commercials, the idea is that the person who loses the most weight is the winner. Lose to win. Some local businesses even have similar competition among their employees to help promote better physical fitness. The biggest loser wins the prize. It's all good fun and the competition helps.

As important as good health is and healthy bodies, our Gospel goes much deeper. It's about healthy souls. It's about losing the weight of sin completely through faith in Jesus. The person who loses his or her sinful life, is the biggest loser. And through faith in Jesus, the lost life is found and one becomes the biggest winner by the power of the Holy Spirit!!!

Jesus asks, **“For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:26)**

The answer is nothing. There is nothing that we can give for our souls...not money, not good deeds...nothing. But thanks be to God that Jesus already has made the big exchange...He already gave what was necessary for our souls - His precious life for ours...His life blood for our eternal gain...our eternal reward! Jesus became the Biggest Loser, the vilest rejected sinner on the cross so that we would become the Biggest winners and gain life, now in this world and eternally!

Jesus explains this in the next verse. **“For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.”**

Jesus is coming! This rotten world will come to end with all the sickness, hate, and violence. And those who have gotten behind Jesus in faith and followed Him in this world, denying self, and taking up one’s cross, will follow Him into the winners circle of Heaven! Jesus promises to reward His faithful who have shone forth their confession of faith by their works.

Can you call yourself the Biggest loser? It’s a good thing if you do. For when you lose your life, Jesus is quick to give you His. He is quick to receive you just as you are.

So, we just sang,

“Just as I am and waiting not, to rid my soul of one dark blot. To Thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.”

“Just as I am, Thou wilt receive. Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve; Because Thy promise I believe. O Lamb of God, I come. I come.”

And so we follow. By the power of the Holy Spirit we renew our minds, not losing heart at this worlds evil, but overcoming the world’s evil with God’s good!

So Paul says, **“Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.” (1 Corinthians 4:16)**

Our outward man is losing and that’s a good thing, because our inward man is being renewed in Jesus and winning, winning in Him! Amen.

“The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)