

**Sermon Notes**  
**September 3, 2023 Peace Lutheran Church**  
**The Holy Gospel of Matthew 16: 21-28**  
**“His Ultimate Purpose”**

Jesus shares four pieces of information with His disciples in our gospel reading: first, He must go to Jerusalem; second, he must undergo great suffering; third, He must be crucified; and fourth, He will be raised on the third day. Notice that the disciples don't ask, “What do you mean, be raised on the third day?” They can't hear the last critical piece of information. They get caught up in the suffering and death parts.

Unsurprisingly, Peter starts protesting. Immediately Jesus puts him in his place: opposition to suffering and death is the work of Satan. Jesus must face suffering and death head-on, and his disciples must as well: “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross” (Matt. 16: 24). (We wonder why church membership is shrinking these days. It's not a great pitch.)

But we need to be clear about what Jesus is saying and what He is not. Self-denial, crosses, and death aren't the exclusive experience of Jesus' followers. They are the experience of every single human being. We are all called at some point to deny our own comfort, face suffering, and eventually face our own deaths. On the way we will face the deaths of others we love.

Jesus is asking something of us, his followers: to face these hard things head-on, without resistance or denial, and to trust that on the other side is resurrection. Being a disciple of Jesus means living in sure and certain hope of the resurrection, expecting that the third day is surely around the corner.

That's far from easy. Just like the first disciples, we have a hard time believing in a resurrection we cannot see, but as followers of Jesus, our calling is to remember and help each other remember the promise of resurrection. This means keeping our eyes open to signs of resurrection.

When do we see those signs? Perhaps after a friend has been widowed, you watch her weep for a long time. You hear her yell, with Jeremiah, at God for acting “like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail” (15; 18). But when she least expects it, she meets someone who also carries an incurable wound. The two stumble into mutual affection, then love - the kind of love that can only be experienced after you have lost the only one you ever thought you could love. Suddenly, in the lives of this couple, it is the third day!

Sometimes the signs are harder to see. Sometimes we do not taste resurrection in this life. But this Sunday we hear God's promise, to Jeremiah, to Moses, to us, to always be with us, to save us and deliver us. God will be with us, carrying us to the third day.

Along the way, Jeremiah reminds us that the Lord will feed us with the Word. God will feed us with bread and wine and a community to care for us, and also with actual words of joy and delight. Messy words and comforting words. Words spoken or set to music, words that get into our heads and hearts. Words that mysteriously fill us with hope and build us up so that, at least sometimes, we can be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer, extend hospitality to strangers, and overcome evil with good.