

## "Must"

Text: Matthew 16:21-26

May our all-powerful God, who is faithful and will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to bear, bless each of you, every moment of every day, with his grace and peace. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

The Christian religion is often cleverly, albeit *unfairly*, demeaned as a "musty religion." The intended double meaning is not lost on us. On the one hand, Christianity is disparaged as outdated – as in old, stale and "musty." It is also mischaracterized as a set of moral demands – as is "you *must* do this" and "you *must* not do that."

Let's take them one at a time. Categorizing the Christian faith as outdated and therefore unnecessary is as arrogant as it is delusional. It's hard to come up with parallels, but on a secular level it would be something akin to claiming that since you have a smart phone, you no longer need a functioning brain. Everyone is free to believe that, but that particular misconception will have inescapable and tragic consequences – *after* it is too late. Every single human being *will* stand before God on Judgment Day, and they will be judged according to the divine truths contained in the Christian faith. *No one* will regard Christianity as musty or outdated on Judgment Day.

On the other hand, those who see the Christian religion as just a set of rules and threats clearly lack what our God supplies *through* the Christian faith: the new man. The new man, created in us at our conversion, does not regard God's will as oppressive but as the perfect guide to direct his life of thanksgiving. To the new man, Christianity is no more *oppressive* than the owner's manual for our new gas grill – which includes both assembly instructions and warnings to avoid physical harm. The goal of the grill manufacturer was not oppression and fear. The goal was to provide enjoyment while avoiding injury. So also the new man in every Christian absolutely *loves* God's commands and warnings *because we recognize both the love and the desire they represent*. God's goal is not to make us miserable. His goal is to include us forever in his heaven.

Yet is or was there a "must" in the Christian religion? Of course there was. In fact that "must" is, in itself, the beating heart of Christianity itself. That "must" is identified in our text for this morning – the divinely inspired words of our God recorded in the 16<sup>th</sup> Chapter Matthew's Gospel:

<sup>ESV</sup> **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. <sup>22</sup> And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." <sup>23</sup> 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." <sup>24</sup> ¶ Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. <sup>26</sup> 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. We thank our God for these holy words, and we now ask him to teach and instruct us through them with this prayer: **"Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth."** Amen.

Before we get back to the "must" of Christianity, 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 sadly 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 – the only part, by the way, for which we ourselves can take credit – that part 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 would like to pretend that if or when *we* do something that God condemns, it's really just a display of our care and concern for another human being – in this case care and concern for Jesus himself. Again, we're just lying to ourselves.

Jesus of course saw right through it. That's why he called Peter (us) out and labeled him (us) as instruments of the devil himself *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."*

One of the things that makes our old Adam the worst of the worst is the fact that we have become so good at denial, but so bad at self-denial. Though we obviously know better, we continue to pretend that so many of the things that we do are neither sinful nor particularly dangerous to our spiritual well-being. Our old Adam knows that the moment we deny that something is bad, then we don't have to bother with self-denial. We can convince ourselves that it is possible to fill our world with sexual images

and not be affected; that we can neglect the study of God's Word and yet not grow weaker in our faith; that we can cling to past injustices but expect that God must ever go on overlooking all that we do, say, or think. Again, all this despite the fact that *we know better.*

Jesus wasn't talking to our new man 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 looking our old Adam square in the eye. This wasn't gospel, since the gospel is never "musty." It never demands; it only gives. This was law – the only language our old Adam understands.

The key words here are ***"deny himself."*** We are fast losing sight of what it really means to deny ourselves. Could you explain it to a neighbor if he were to ask you? In part it means to learn to say no to the filthy flow of ideas, desires and lusts that flow non-stop from our sinful nature. This includes everything that comes from that evil side within us, from how to spend our leisure time to how we can save ourselves. Obviously this is not going to be an easy task since all of these sin inclinations are home-grown. These inclinations, ideas, emotions come from within us. They are part of us and therefore will seem right – just as Peter's counsel must have sounded right in his own ears. Jesus nonetheless called it demonic. Hear this well, for Jesus would without question affix the same label to everything that flows from our own personal old Adam.

Paul wasn't exaggerating when he said in Romans 7:18, ***"I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh."*** Writing by inspiration, Paul there wrote *exactly* what God himself meant.

Feeling bad about yourself yet? The fact is you and I should never feel any other way about that old Adam side of ourselves. Every single time we find ourselves growing comfortable or complacent with the evil that lives within us we would do well to look intently into the mirror of our text and just exactly what God has to say about our sinful nature. Every time we should hear him say, ***"You are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man,"*** and again, ***"Whoever would save his life will lose it... 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?"***

Finally we return to the "must" of true Christianity. Did you catch it 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 "must" is that Jesus had to go suffer and die in Jerusalem. Why *must* he? Why was he *obligated*? No human being could 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.

Some will undoubtedly argue: *"But what about what comes next? 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.'?"*

Think back to those instructions for the assembly and use of our 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. <sup>98</sup> Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me. <sup>103</sup> How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! <sup>104</sup> Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. <sup>105</sup> Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."*** (Psalm 119:97-98, 103-105)

We learn to perpetually acknowledge our own personal wickedness because then and only then will we rightly understand and appreciate the "must" 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. 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

<sup>ESV</sup> **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. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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? <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless."

<sup>ESV</sup> **Romans 12:9-21** Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. <sup>10</sup> Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. <sup>11</sup> Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. <sup>14</sup> ¶ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. <sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. <sup>16</sup> Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. <sup>17</sup> Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. <sup>18</sup> If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. <sup>19</sup> 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." <sup>20</sup> 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." <sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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Michael Roehl, Pastor Today's Organist: Angela Pfennig

**The 13th Sunday after Pentecost – September 3, 2017**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 266 (Stanzas 1-3) (Red Hymnal)

"O Lord, Our God, Thy Holy Word"

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

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

**The First 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 96 (Supplement page 26) (Brown Hymnal)

**The Second 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 – 325 (Stanzas 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"O Thou that Hear'st when Sinners Cry"

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

**"Must"**

## The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

## The Installation of the 2017-2018 Sunday School Teachers

## The Post-Sermon Hymn – 325 (Stanza 5) (Red Hymnal)

"O Thou that Hear'st when Sinners Cry"

## The Offering followed by the Prayers

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn – 266 (Stanzas 4-5) (Red Hymnal)

"O Lord, Our God, Thy Holy Word"

## 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 (33) Ave (43) August Mortgage Balance (\$36,792)

### This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship/Coffee Time
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>-6:00 p.m.</b>	– Confirmation Class
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday Worship w/Communion
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship/Coffee Time

**CLC News** – Pastor Michael Wilke has returned the call to Immanuel of Mankato. Both of our CLC congregations in the path of Hurricane Harvey (Corpus Christi and Houston area) have apparently been spared from serious damage to their property. Pastor Mark Weis is considering the call to St. Luke's of Lemmon.

**Women's Fellowship** – The annual Salad Supper of the Women's Fellowship has been scheduled for Monday, September 11 at 6pm. Those attending are asked to bring a salad to share. A business meeting will follow the supper. For further information please contact Cindy Ollenburger.

**Regular Schedule Resumes** – We return to our regular, non-summer schedule next Sunday, with Sunday school and Bible Class at 9am and worship service at 10am.

**Confirmation Class** – Parents and Confirmation students please note that Confirmation begins this coming Wednesday at 6pm.

**In Our Prayers** – Part of Christian love involves learning to look outside of ourselves – beyond our own personal or family/friends' needs. Since God assures us that prayer is both powerful and effective, it is something all of us can do. Remember those in Nepal and Texas who have suffered recent weather-related loss and hardship.