

# "Surely Not, Lord"

Text: Matthew 16:21-26

May you thankfully accept from the Lord's hand every one of his amazing blessings. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

While sadly disconcerting, it should not surprise us when avowed atheists (those who deny the very existence of God) act contrary to the will of the God who, despite their denial, actually did create them. Their beliefs are catastrophically misguided, but they are acting in harmony with those misguided beliefs. What *is* rather surprising is when those who *do* acknowledge the existence of God, treat his will and direction for their lives as optional, or who abandon his will altogether. To refuse to obey the God you do not believe exists is one thing. To refuse to obey the God you *do* believe exists is something else altogether. Denying the very existence of God, atheists have no fear of repercussions for disobeying the God whose existence they deny. Not so with those who acknowledge the existence of the God they nonetheless choose to disobey, or who simply disregard what he says.

I'm sure you probably agree with this, but to whom did or do you mentally apply this truth? Most of us externalize the danger by applying it to others. We shield ourselves from the bite of the law by imagining that only others are here being condemned, and therefore only others need to address the problem. Yet Christians also resist God's will in their lives, on a number of different levels. We too are therefore in constant danger of responding to our God's will for our lives with a "Surely not, Lord."

Our text for this morning gives us one example of a devout Christian man who resisted God's will because he thought he knew better. By God's grace we will use this example not to sit in condescending judgment over against the man who failed so spectacularly, but as a mirror into our own hearts, attitudes and failures. The question we seek to address is this: "Do you and I ever approach the Word and will of my God with a 'Surely not, Lord'?" The text that will guide and instruct us this morning is the Word of God recorded in the 16<sup>th</sup> Chapter of 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. <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 God's Words. God gave us these words so that we might not simply believe that he exists, but so that we might know both his character and his will for our lives. We ask our God to instruct and strengthen us through these words as we pray: "**Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth.**" Amen.

Most or all are very familiar with the event recorded in our text. Peter attempted to prevent his Lord from going to Jerusalem to suffer and die. To put it another way, Peter tried to prevent Jesus from saving the human race, including therefore also himself and everyone he loved. It's easy for us, who have the advantages of time and the completed New Testament, to condemn Peter's actions as naïve and misguided. Do you suppose that that was the reason God the Holy Spirit caused our text to be recorded and preserved? Was his purpose to belittle Peter, or to "put him in his place," or to make us feel better about ourselves? Or did he perhaps have a different reason for preserving this account for all of the countless souls that would follow, including this morning you and me?

The answer should be obvious to those who have come to know the true nature and character of the God who both created and saved them. God is never petty or vindictive. Those are human traits, human failings. The God who taught us to conceal the private sins of others whenever practicable would never break his own rules out of petty malevolence or cruelty. As with all of Scripture, he caused this event to be recorded and preserved not as idle gossip but as an act of love to instruct and benefit all who would follow. What lesson or lessons does he therefore want us to learn?

The first is that love and human emotion are never supposed to countermand or negate God's will. Peter was obviously speaking and acting out of a certain sort of love for his Lord. He made the

mistake of allowing his emotions to dictate his thoughts, and his thoughts to direct his words and actions. Consider all that was short-circuited when Peter allowed his emotions to dictate his thoughts and words. Clearly he cared about his Lord. He didn't want Jesus to have to suffer, let alone die. The world's opinion of Peter here would be that he should have been encouraged, even congratulated, for "listening to his heart" and acting in love for another human being. Jesus' opinion of what Peter was doing was summed up perfectly in his response: "**Get behind me, Satan!**"

Recognize the stark contrast here between how the world thinks and how God thinks. The world always opts for the easy way out. Jesus knew that often the hard way is the only way. The world believes that human beings, when they act out of love, are always to be commended and encouraged. They believe that loving emotions must always be right and God-pleasing. Jesus swept this nonsense aside when he responded to Peter's statement of "love" and "concern" with: "**You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.**" "Love" and "good intentions" don't make everything okay; they don't render everything that follows acceptable in God's eyes.

We hear a great deal of that sort of evil today. Homosexuality could never be "wrong" because "love," in whatever form it takes, is always good and right. Mutilating children into tragic caricatures of what they were not created to be is commendable because it is done in "love" for that poor, troubled child. Murdering a child in its mother's womb is not an act of hatred toward the helpless, unwanted child. It is an act of love toward the mother that would otherwise be inconvenienced. In all of these cases, and so many more, the world squares up to their Creator God and declares, "*Surely not, Lord!*"

Recognize, however, that "the world" is not just out there, it resides within each of us. It is the sinful flesh (the old Adam) that continues to live also within every Christian.

The problem comes whenever we do exactly what Jesus condemned in Peter, whenever we "*set our minds on the things of man, rather than the things of God,*" whenever we allow our human emotions to dictate our thoughts and actions, rather than the Word of God. And yet everyone here today roundly and unreservedly condemns homosexuality, abortion, child mutilation and all the rest, so is this really a problem that Christians need to address? Are we ever guilty of our own private "*Surely not, Lord!*"?

In the Third Petition of the Lord's Prayer we say to our God: "*Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*" Do we really mean that? Really? Do we really mean that what we want to happen on earth is not what we want but what God wants? What if God determines that what you need is abject poverty? "*Amen, so be it!*" or "*Surely not, Lord!*" What if God in his infinite wisdom determines that you, your spouse, your child, or your grandchild must suffer, or even die? "*Amen, so be it!*" or "*Surely not, Lord!*" What if God determines that your own body will be crippled with disease, injury, or infirmity? "*Amen, so be it!*" or "*Surely not, Lord!*"

As in all things, our Savior Jesus also here provided the perfect example. Jesus is the only one who prayed the Lord's Prayer with a perfect heart. He is also the one who provided us with perfect examples that we can follow without apprehension or reservation. Arguably the greatest example pertaining to this topic was given in the Garden of Gethsemane. Facing what he knew would be suffering beyond our mortal ability to fully comprehend, he asked his Father to "**remove the cup from him**" – that is, to find a different path by which mankind could be rescued. If ever there was a reasonable time, an understandable moment, to say to God "*Surely not, Lord!*" that was it. The only sinless man in the history of the planet had to suffer unimaginably and to die horribly for the sins of everyone else? "*Surely not, Lord!*" But that's not what he said, is it? What *did* he say? "**Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.**"

There are great and invaluable lessons to learn from this. There is nothing wrong with bringing our needs and desires to our Heavenly Father's throne. He himself has invited us to do so. Yet in the Third Petition ("*Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*") our God taught us to trust him with the answer, to trust his love and wisdom – both of which are infinitely greater than our own. In fact it could be argued that that section of the Lord's Prayer touches every other part. Knowing both his wisdom and his love for us, we absolutely want him to sift through our many requests and to grant only what he knows to be best.

Yet we still have not reached the highest ground in this or any other text if we imagine it is only about life in this sin-shattered world – which would be just another example of "*setting our minds on the things of man, rather than the things of God.*" There is more and greater also here.

Jesus followed his rebuke of Peter with these words in our text: ***"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?"*** The context is obviously Peter's misguided attempt to **save** Jesus' earthly life. Had Jesus followed Peter's advice, the result would not only have been failure and eternal death for himself, but the **loss** of the eternal souls of every man, woman, and child ever conceived. Yet we still miss the greater point if we imagine that by **"deny himself"** Jesus is just telling us that we need to practice restraint and moderation when it comes to earthly things; if we hear him telling us to learn to say "no" to our earthly yearnings and desires. There is much more involved in "denying self."

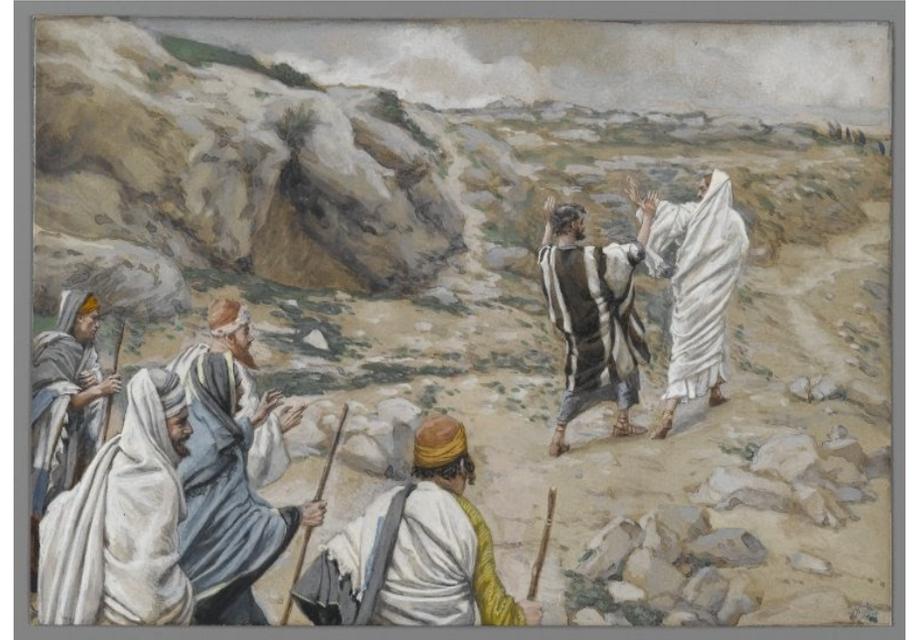
"Self" is everything that comes from us – our ideas, our opinions, our efforts. "Self" can't save us, but that's the logical conclusion of every religion in the world, except Christianity. Our natural sense of how things work tells us that *we* have to do, *we* have to pay, *we* have to make up for, *we* have to make ourselves lovable or acceptable. That seems logical, but God's Word tells us it is exactly wrong. Giving up on "self" means trusting in another, Jesus Christ, who supplied the payment for our sins that we could not. The debt for our sins cannot be paid by "self." The good news is that Jesus paid it for us. On Calvary's cross. As our substitute. The innocent for the guilty. We are not saved by doing, but by faith in the One who did it for us, and credits his goodness to us.

To this the sin-addled mind reacts: *"Surely not, Lord! Surely something is required of me! Surely I must pay part, if not all. Surely, Lord, it simply cannot be that simple, that easy for me, that your Son has paid all that I owed!"* In his 1<sup>st</sup> Epistle, John addressed this natural doubt and skepticism that the Christian faith can be that simple for us, that painless: ***"By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; <sup>20</sup> for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart."*** Just as surely as we need to learn never to doubt God's condemnation of sin and unbelief, so also we dare never challenge his declaration of peace and forgiveness through faith alone in his Son. Amen.

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. <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."

ESV **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.

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. <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?"



# ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

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Michael Roehl, Pastor

The 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – September 11, 2022

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 530 (Red Hymnal)

"Thy Ways, O Lord, with Wise Design"

## 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) Note particularly in this reading Jeremiah's struggle in connection with the work that God had called him to carry out. He was called to bring a message of law to a brutal and rebellious people. The response of those who heard was predictably hostile. Yet Jeremiah did not do what he did out of hatred or animosity. In love he spoke exactly what the Lord told him to speak, knowing that God, who **"wants all men to be saved,"** could be trusted to commission him to speak what was necessary to accomplish that goal.

## The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 121 (Page 42) (Brown Hymnal)

**The Second Lesson:** (Romans 12:9-21) Surely the godless of Jesus' day were every bit as wicked as they are today. Maybe even worse. The godless represent a tremendous challenge for God's children of every generation. Yet note that Jesus does not advocate hatred or retaliation, but humility and love. The ultimate goal is never to crush in hatred but to win over in love. God grant us such love for souls, who must one day stand before their Maker.

## The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed (Revised) (On screen)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 532 (Red Hymnal)

"Thy Way, Not Mine, O Lord"

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

**"Surely Not, Lord"**

## The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

## The Prayers

## The Pre-Communion Hymn – 306 (Verses 1 & 4) (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Jesus Christ, Thou Hast Prepared"

## The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

## The Distribution

## The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn – 446 (Stanzas 1, 4 & 6) (Red Hymnal)

"Rise, My Soul, to Watch and Pray"

## Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking Holy Communion** – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

## Attendance – Sunday (19) Average (33)

### This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour
<b>Tues-Thurs</b>	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– WCPC in Hecla
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour

**CLC News** – Redemption of Lynnwood has called Pastor Rob Sauers. Immanuel of Winter Haven has called Pastor Nathanael Mayhew.

**West Central Pastoral Conference** – Pastor Roehl is scheduled to attend the West Central Pastoral Conference in Hecla this week, leaving Monday evening and returning Thursday afternoon.

**Return to Regular Schedule** – We have returned to our regular service schedule, with Sunday School and Bible Class at 9am and worship service at 10am. Due to out-of-town meetings this week and next, midweek Confirmation and Bible Study are scheduled to begin on September 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Mission Festival** – This year's Mission Festival speaker is Pastor Nathanael Mayhew. A fellowship meal will follow. The date has been set for October 16<sup>th</sup>. Please mark it on your calendar and plan to attend.