**9/3/23**

**Water Washed, Spirit Born, Cross Carrying Members**

**Matthew 16:21-28**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:2 NRSV) (2) **Amen.**

This morning we get to witness and be a part of something very special. We get to experience what many may identify or call step one of our faith journeys. We get to witness an outward act of faith that we often see an infant or small child experience. Today we get to witness an adult affirming her faith at the very font that has been brought here front and center in front of all of you at the very steps that lead up to this altar.

Now, if we think to ourselves, we admittedly seem to be more familiar with it being the parent’s choice to be baptized. We typically identify with the fact that it is the parents who make the decision to bring up their child in the faith, and they then hope their child will follow in their footsteps. However, today we get a sister, her friends, her family, and our congregation being the ones to sponsor her and bring her up in this very faith. So, this morning this is something different that we are going to be experiencing here… or is it? I mean after all we are all reminded that we are indeed children of God, and that for certain is no matter what age or part of life that any one of us is at. We all have been Water Washed and Spirit Born at this font, or one very similar to it. We all managed to follow the very example that Jesus set when he went to John to be Baptized. He indeed humbled himself and showed that no title or lineage was more important than that of another. He showed that in vulnerability there is much to be gained. Jesus set the very example and showed the very importance that affirming our faith in front of others carries… and hello… he was an adult!!! Wow… mind blowing right?

Baptism is indeed one of the two sacraments we as Lutherans come to find vitally important in our faith lives. God is always calling, and he always wants us to be part of his family. It just happens for all of us at a different time, and I am here to remind you that is perfectly okay. As there is no one way to do this faith walk, but the most important part of it is to just do it! Just like the famous Nike slogan says.

As I sat down with Wendy and Del on Friday afternoon, I got to hear why this was important for Del, and I got to hear why she really wanted this for her sister. I got to hear that she wanted to ensure her sister was with her in paradise following this life here on this very ball of mud. I got to hear why Del believed baptism was vital in her sister’s journey. Now, I also got to hear from Wendy. I got to hear why this was not just important for her sister, but maybe why this was even more important for herself than she had initially realized. After all, I reminded Wendy that last Sunday even though she may have been nudged by Del, that she indeed was the one that had asked to speak with me privately before our worship service. I reminded Wendy that she had the continued hunger for her faith, and that she was the one that had asked to affirm her faith in front of others. As we sat here Wendy went on to share with me her continued faith walk and journey. She and Del of course shared some good and bad stories as well. Wendy shared some things that even had her and Del in tears, and at one point I was almost admittedly in tears with them. That raw emotion, and that love for her faith is something we all wish we could bottle up sometimes when things get rough and we need the reminder of why we are continuing onward in our efforts to get back to our eternal home with our Lord and Savior. She then lightened the mood up, and even painted the picture of playing pinochle up in Heaven with those that had went on before her. Wendy also shared how she is searching for a church in her home area, and how she is hopeful that others will follow her example and join her when she does find a home to worship in. After this discussion with Del and Wendy I found it very hard to deny that Wendy be baptized here today. Now, I admittedly may or may not be doing things the exact way our church expects them to be done. That is the fun in the learning experience I am going through here as the Vicar. However, what I will not do is let someone hang on the outside of our family of believers and not be Water Washed and Spirit Born!

This brings me to the very point and essence of our Gospel Reading today. So, many of us can identify with being part of a club or group and being card carrying members over our lifetimes at one point or another, correct? We pay our dues, we go to the functions, we find where we best fit in, we may even eventually take on a roll as an officer or leader over the course of time. However, that is as far as we can go. There is a ceiling or a limit in the earthly clubs we can join. And, as Heather found out this morning, that even if you pay your dues you might end up being locked out. Planet Fitness showed its earthly limits today as someone may have called out sick, or forgot to wake up and unlock the doors for their members to be able to enter and work out. The good thing is that our eternal club with the Lord never has locked doors, and is never closed for business.

Today we are also reminded that we are not just some card carrying members, but that we are indeed cross carrying members. Now, that admittedly carries a little weight, doesn’t it? Yep, totally fit that bad joke in right there. However, that bad joke, or totally honest truth is the very essence of our faith that we love, and that in which we might even hate or deny at times. Now, why is that, you might ask. You see the disciples in our story this morning were all on board with things initially. They were ready to do anything, just like the very Royal Ranger Motto I recited each and every week at the beginning of the meetings I had with my Christian boy scout group. However, there was more than meets the eye, just like the Transformers cartoon or movie many of you have probably watched in your lives. You see “God’s plan to save humanity was unfolding as intended, but you can sense the disciples were becoming agitated. This certainly wasn’t what they signed on to when Jesus asked them to follow. Fishing for people, healing, teaching – that was more like it, but death?!” (3)

I mean “Why would anyone want to be a Christian? We are told to take up our cross and follow Jesus.” (3) “Please remember that in Jesus’ day the cross represented the worst punishment for evil that anyone could think of.” (4) So, it was easily understandable as to why they had fear or trepidation. Then, to top it all off “We are told that to want to save our life will mean we lose it.” (3) Carrying the cross and dying were not what they signed on for at all. It is definitely not something we sign on for to be honest either. I can picture them or even us saying at times, nope, not today, Jesus! For their mindset and our mindset can be so limited at times. We are forever reminded that they and us need to yet again be open and broaden our scope and insight.

Now, I hope I am not scaring you away before your very baptism here this morning Wendy. However, this is something we are all called to in our Christian faith walk and journey that sometimes we are all not too admittedly comfortable with, just like the disciples. We all want to be liked, and we all do not want to be ridiculed or made fun of for sure. We also do not want to always realize that the sharing of our faith and love for the Lord could be that which takes us from our very lives and family and friends here on this earth. We are reminded as Christians that we are called to show our faith as an outright example that we live each and every day. Doing that may not be met with the most loving, kind, or heartfelt words or respect, even though that is what we would hope for and desire. We as Christians are not called to fit in, as a matter of fact we are called to stand out. We are called to do the very things that some may not even consider doing for their very own family. “We know that as Christians we are called to follow the example of Jesus. We strive to do this—up to a point. We attempted to love others, even our enemies. We try to allow the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self- control, to be a part of our lives. When it comes to imitating Jesus’ suffering and sacrifice, most of us draw the line.” (5) So, that is exactly why “We gather for worship and are fed so that we can live the other six days as disciples of Jesus open to the needs of others.” (3) We are recentered, refocused, and recommitted to do what it takes to lead others to Christ. Even if we realize it or not, and that it may indeed be met with the worst kind of opposition. However, thanks be to God that we can share our faith and our love for the Lord and not feel empty or alone.

Alright, enough from me and my thoughts and feelings here today. Let’s explore something I found rather interesting while doing my research. I read “…the story of a Russian man who was born to atheist parents, grew up in an atheist town and attended an atheist school. He had never in his life heard the truth of Jesus Christ. But somewhere along the path of his life he saw a picture of a man who had died on a cross. He never forgot that picture and often wondered why he was strangely drawn to that picture. He wanted to understand it. At first, he thought the man must have been a very bad criminal. Then he thought that he might have been a very persecuted man. Eventually he met a Christian who also knew about this picture. Anxiously the Russian man asked the Christian to explain it to him. He did, and finally the Russian man knew why he had such a strange attraction to that picture. The picture, of course, was of Jesus’ crucifixion. The explanation was this man’s ticket to salvation.” (4)

We learn “What Peter was struggling to understand and what Jesus was gradually unfolding before his eyes in His earthly ministry was that He was not just another ordinary man. He wasn’t even just an extra-ordinary man. He wasn’t a man who came to use the ways of men to destroy evil. He was the perfect, pure, righteous, truthful Son of God. Satan had the power to crush anything of this world and of men. But he couldn’t crush Jesus. In fact, by trying, he was crushed. This is why we, like the Russian man, are not only drawn to this picture of a dead man on a cross, but more importantly to the meaning of it. In death, the death of the cross, Jesus defeated the cause of death and ended its reign over this earth.” (4)

I also want to share this very important viewpoint before we close things off here with this sermon today. So, “… we need to be clear about what Jesus is saying and what he is not. Self-denial, crosses, and death aren’t the exclusive experiences 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.” (1) As we do this, as we live life, we are to focus on the resurrection. We are indeed called to be Water Washed, Spirit Born, Cross Carrying Members! So, let us all fulfill our call!

Amen.

**References**

(1) Sundays and Seasons

Preaching

Year A 2023

September 3rd, 2023

14th Sunday After Pentecost

(2) Bible.com

(3) SermonCentral.com

15 Pentecost A

Contributed by Roger Haugen on Aug 29, 2002

Scripture: Matthew 16:21-28

Denomination: Lutheran

(4) SermonCentral.com

Crossbearing

Contributed by Michael Walther on Aug 29, 2011

Scripture: Matthew 16:21-28

Denomination: Lutheran

(5) SermonCentral.com

Disciples Of Christ Series

Contributed by Kevin Ruffcorn on Sep 2, 2008

Scripture: Matthew 16:21-28

Denomination: Lutheran

**Matthew 16:21-28**

After Peter confesses that Jesus is “the Messiah, the Son of the living God”

(16:16), Jesus reveals the ultimate purpose of his ministry. These words prove

hard to accept, even for a disciple whom Jesus has called a “rock.”

21From that time on, [after Peter confessed that Jesus was the Messiah,] Jesus

began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great

suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed,

and on the third day be raised. 22And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke

him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.” 23But he

turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to

me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

24Then Jesus told his disciples, “If any want to become my followers, let them

deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 25For those who want to

save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

26For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or

what will they give in return for their life?

27“For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and

then he will repay everyone for what has been done. 28Truly I tell you, there are

some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man

coming in his kingdom.”