

Text: Matthew 16:21-26 (Pentecost 15, Series A, September 13, 2020)

Theme: The Crown Implies the Cross.

Virtue (basic truth): Jesus connects the joy of his victory with an oh-so-worth-it cross.

Malay (our problem): sinners want the crown without the cross

Telic Note (goal): By means of this sermon, the Spirit of grace fixes our attention on the crown of glory and, at the same time, strengthens us to carry our crosses, too.

Propositional Statement (aim): The winner's circle is a beautiful place; but "being there" also implies the effort involved in "getting there." And, we forget that. Today, even as our hearts are fixed on Jesus' victory, the Spirit of Grace helps us understand all that's involved in it. So, today, we respect that *the crown implies the cross*.

Specific Law in Text: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24).

Specific Gospel in Text: "Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life" (Matthew 16:21).

Doctrinal Thought: In his accomplishing our salvation, Jesus had to endure the cross.

Sanctification Thought: *"Lord Jesus, in resolute love, you endured the cross so that I might enjoy the eternal crown. Savior, thank you! As you fix my heart on your love for me, help me also to bear my crosses for you. Give me strength and patience and wisdom to follow you in a way that glorifies you for your cross and adores you for the crown of life you've won for me. In your name, Friend, I am bold to ask it. Amen!"*

Matthew 16:21-26

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

²² Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"

²³ Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. ²⁶ What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?"

Matthew displays God's divine heart for the world sent his Son, as promised, to be the Messiah and Redeemer of the world. By his grace, we're at peace with him! Alleluia and Amen!

Last Saturday, a three-year-old horse named, *Authentic*, cantered out of Churchill Downs with a Kentucky Derby title attached to its name. It's the Derby, and that's what's supposed to happen; a horse wins it. But, to me, here's the crazy part: in 2 minutes and .61 seconds of work, *Authentic* pursed \$1.86 million. Two minutes! That's over \$15,500 a second in that pay-day. Could you imagine!? And now, it's all rose gardens and rose wreaths, and all the pomp, all the pampering, and all the pasture associated with being a Derby champ. A proven winner, a title and trophy to show it and, from here on out, *Authentic*'s life is really, really good. Obviously.

But here's what we could also note: while last Saturday was a \$1.86 million dollar pay-day for *Authentic*, it wasn't only a notch over 2 minutes that got the colt to the winner's circle. We get it. Unseen reality is that an insane amount of effort and energy were invested into that colt. There's reason pro horse trainers like Bob Baffert get paid buku dollars for what they do. We see the horse in the circle, they know what it takes to get it there; we applaud the glory of the garland, they apprehend the investment and exercise, energy, effort and hours upon hours of handling required. We see the winner's crown and pay-out; they see the cross and the cost.

Now, why do I say that and what in the world does it have to do with our Scripture in focus from Matthew 16? Fair question. Here's the connection: almost two millennia removed from Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, it's really easy for us to only see him in the glory of the winner's circle. Victorious Champion – risen, indeed! Absolutely right. Because he is.

But we also need to understand his crown of glory wasn't a painless stroll on Palestinian dirt. So much more involved than a weekend in and around Jerusalem. And we should understand that, even from Jesus' perspective, ***the crown implies the cross*** – but that's not a deflating deterrent; wasn't for Jesus, isn't for us. In fact, in amazing grace, it's this beautiful reality that helps us understand his love for us. And our lives for him. That's what we pray the Spirit helps us understand from our sermon Foundation.

Read it, and we won't re-read it; but remember this section in its context. Last week, in our gospel lesson, Peter acknowledged – the other disciples agreed – Jesus is "*the Messiah, the Son of the living God*" (Matthew 16:16). Remember? They adored his identity; they got that Jesus was the God-promised Champion. Now Jesus builds on that, to help them – and us – understand what that means – for him, for them, for us. That's today's section that transitions from the Messiah's identity to the Messiah's activity. Could say: Jesus wears the crown ... now we get to understand what it takes to get him there.

That's why Jesus connects his identity with his objective. And, really, from here on out in his ministry, Jesus pulls no punches in his dialogue of what that involves. That's exactly what he starts to unveil as he talks about the fact that he "must go to Jerusalem and suffer . . . must be killed and on the third day raised to life" (Matthew 16:21). He's sees his mission clearly: the winner's circle of Savior means serious and perfect effort. Simply: ***the crown implies the cross.***

But that wasn't the Messiah the Jewish people had dreamt of. So, Peter, likely a bit emboldened from Jesus' earlier platitude, corrects him. Literally he "*started to rebuke*" Jesus. Because if Jesus really is who he says he is, if he is the promised Messiah, suffering and crosses should be unavoidable. And if he just does the Messiah thing right, the glory is good and the crown is easy. But Jesus won't even let him finish his rebuke; immediately he calls the *Rock* a tripping stone. "*Get behind me, Satan*" (Matthew 16:23). Peter wants the crown without the cross. Jesus says emphatically: ***the crown implies the cross.***

Amazing reality to ponder. Jesus' immediate reaction teaches the depth of our sin and the height of God's love. But, somehow, we rationalize sin as "not that big of a deal." Jesus says, "they'll cost me my life." Somehow, we deem dying for our little-lies as over-kill. Jesus underscores the reality: it's wage is death. Period. Somehow, we think the cross is totally avoidable. The Savior's heart for us says otherwise. And in the profound way God is loving and merciful, he's also holy and just. Jesus knows ***the crown implies the cross.*** And he will not be deterred.

So he goes. In total control. And in total selflessness. In profound love. And in patient power. So much more than a few hours one Friday. Every day. Every step. Every breath. In line with God's will. Because that's what our forgiveness cost. That was the only way. And, somehow, in that gracious heart, he saw our souls as worth it. He tasted death so we get to taste his forgiveness. He endured the cross so we experience life. ***The crown implies the cross,*** so he went to it for us. And he won. Savior. Champion. Victor. Jesus. How difficult it was. How sweet it is! How amazingly it changes our eternities. How elegantly it changes our lives!

To help us grasp that, let me throw out the name *John Valezquez*. He's the jockey that rode *Authentic* to victory. I'll acknowledge right away, I know nothing about horse-racing. But, even though the horse did all the work, the jockey's no slouch either. In fact, the training that goes into being a professional jockey is intense: read this morning John Valezquez works out 4+ hours a day, seven days a week – with a regiment of swimming, cycling, running, and lifting. On top of that, his diet is insane; and, at some point, he has to ride the horse to learn the horse to race the horse. So, *Authentic* won; but Valezquez wasn't disconnected.

Please understand me: in no way am I saying – nor does the Bible ever teach – that we have to do our part to win salvation. That is not our work. Jesus did. Full and free. His cross is proof. Salvation's won. And, because he stands in the winner's circle, we get to stand there with him.

That's grace. And, I'm certainly not calling us jockeys, but let's realize: his victory affects us – in a good way. But his crown implies the cross in our lives, too.

Let's talk about that. When we talk about crosses, there's three categories we can reference.

- 1) Christ's cross – and everything connected to it: his life and death, his victory, our forgiveness. It's the gospel; and that's why we lift high the cross!
- 2) Anything difficult that people endure – sicknesses and sadnesses, sin's consequences in our lives. And please know, as you carry those, the Savior's heart of compassion goes out to you; ours does, too. We won't downplay that; and God strengthen you to walk with them day by day. But,
- 3) The type of crosses Jesus refers to in Matthew 16 is really more anything Christians endure for the sake of the gospel; the hardships and persecutions and struggles with which we wrestle because of our faith as we live the lives to which he's called us and do the things of which he's asked us. And, those are the crosses we talk about when we say *the crown implies the cross* – and it's not a bad thing.

Remember again: we don't participate in our salvation – Jesus won it already! – but let's realize: his cross affects us, too. But it's stunning! Because it's the message of his cross and crown that enlightens us to his love and forgiveness. It's the message of his cross and crown that empowers us, by his grace, to live in confidence of his love and of the eternity he won for us, and to do so in a way that pleases him. It's the message of his cross and crown that embolden us to bring our burdens to him and to carry our crosses after him. It's the message of his cross and crown that enlivens us to enjoy his blessings – and every blessing! – in a way that makes him smile. And every day, Christians – every day! – you get to live known that the crown implies the cross. And with that promise, with eyes on eternity, he gives you strength to live!

\$1.86 million for 2.00.61 minutes of serious, serious effort. Not bad, eh?

Forgiveness, because Jesus put in so much more. Peace with God, because Jesus endured the cross. Eternal victory, because Jesus won the crown and gives it to you. Even better. Dear Christians, every day, delight your heart to know that *the crown implies the cross*. And God, in his magnificent love, strengthen you to follow his and to carry yours to victory.

Alleluia and Amen!