

## Sermon for the Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

August 30, 2020

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

*Year A, Proper 17: Jeremiah 15:15–21; Psalm 26:1–8; Romans 12:1–8;  
Matthew 16:21–28\**

The week before last, Father Jay Smith and I were in the sacristy. He remarked that he would be preaching on the first half of a gospel passage, Peter’s recognition that Jesus was the Christ, last Sunday’s gospel, and that I would be preaching on the rest of the story today. Jay asked, “Why did they do that?” I replied, “So Roman Catholics could hear sermons on the papacy for two Sundays, not just one.” Today we hear Peter rebuked as Jesus had rebuked Satan when Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness. But Jesus doesn’t just say to Peter, “Begone, Satan!”<sup>1</sup> He says, “If any [one] would come after me, let him [or her] deny himself or [herself] and take up his [or her] cross and follow me.”<sup>2</sup>

It’s sometimes hard now to remember how strong, for the most part, were the ecumenical trends of the 1960s and early 1970s. That is no longer the case. That said, I’ve always been welcomed graciously and respectfully

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 4:10.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 16:24. The Greek is inclusive.

by Roman Catholic clergy and academics when I have been with them in Rome. In 1967, Pope Paul VI, in a speech to the Vatican's Secretariat for Christian Unity, said, "We know well that the chief obstacle to Christian unity is the pope."<sup>3</sup> (That's my translation of the French original. Often translations are made available for important papal documents and speeches on the Vatican website, but not this one.) As far as I know, none of Paul's successors have followed this opening for Roman Catholics to follow Jesus in a new way.

But they are not alone. When John Paul II died, the papal master of ceremonies asked the Ecumenical Patriarch to represent the Christian East, and the Archbishop of Canterbury to represent the Protestant West and follow the celebrant, then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, in offering incense at the deceased pope's coffin. Canterbury said yes; the other Orthodox churches' patriarchs objected to being represented by the bishop of Constantinople. I can't help but think that an opportunity was missed.

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<sup>3</sup> My translation. The speech was delivered in French.  
[http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/fr/speeches/1967/april/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_spe\\_19670428\\_unione-cristiani.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/fr/speeches/1967/april/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19670428_unione-cristiani.html), (accessed 30 August 2020).

Many of you might recall that I have been following Dr. Mark Davis' Scripture blog for many years. He translates the gospel lessons from the Greek. He's a Presbyterian pastor in Newport Beach, California. He calls his work on today's gospel lesson, "Peter's Fall: Everyone's Call."<sup>4</sup> He comments in some detail on translation choices and what he thinks the evangelists are trying to convey.

He often likes to draw his readers' attention to ambiguity in the Greek and to words that are related in Greek but not English. Again, last Sunday, after Simon identified Jesus as the Christ, Jesus said to him—this is Davis' translation: "Simon [Son of Jonah], you are [Rock], and on this rock I will build my church . . . I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of the heavens . . . whatever you may bind on the earth, will be [what] has been bound in the heaven, and whatever you may loose on the earth will be [what] has been loosed in the heaven."<sup>5</sup>

Davis' translation of today's passage begins, "From then Jesus began to show his disciples that it is binding

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 16:21–28. <https://leftbehindandlovingit.blogspot.com/2014/08/peters-fall-everyones-call.html>, (accessed 30 August 2020).

<sup>5</sup> <https://leftbehindandlovingit.blogspot.com/2014/08/peter-fesses-up.html>, (accessed 30 August 2020).

on him to go into Jerusalem . . . to suffer . . . to be killed . . . and on the third day raised.”<sup>6</sup> The Greek verb “to bind” means, “to confine a [person] or thing by various kinds of restraints, bind, tie.”<sup>7</sup> Peter does not respond, “God forbid, Lord.” Here are two other translations: from Davis, “Mercy to you, Lord: This will not be to you,”<sup>8</sup> and from Professor Ulrich Luz, “[God] be gracious to you, Lord.”<sup>9</sup>

Peter’s response doesn’t sound like he’s trying to hinder Jesus but to understand in this moment how this could be the Father’s will. Jesus’ response suggests Jesus expected more. He looks at the Rock and says, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block”—a stone you trip over—“to me because you are not opining the things of God but the things of humans.”<sup>10</sup>

In Matthew, how a person responds to Jesus Christ matters for salvation. The message of Jesus is the same

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<sup>6</sup> Davis blog, Matthew 16:21–28.

<sup>7</sup> *A Greek-English Lexicon of New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (BDAG) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), *s.v.* “δέω,” 221–22.

<sup>8</sup> Davis blog, Matthew 16:21–28.

<sup>9</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8–20: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 380.

<sup>10</sup> Davis blog, Matthew 16:21–28.

as the message of John the Baptist, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”<sup>11</sup>

Matthew and Luke follow Mark in recounting the story of Peter’s confession, followed by the first prediction of his suffering and death. In Mark, Matthew, and Luke, “If anyone would come after me, let him or deny himself or herself and take up his or her cross and follow me.”<sup>12</sup> Then Jesus says, “For whoever would save his or her life will lose it; and whoever loses his or her life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.”<sup>13</sup>

These words of Jesus are found in John when Jesus is Jerusalem for Passover. He said, “The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”<sup>14</sup>

I want to conclude with words from John’s discourse on the Bread of Life. Jesus said, “I have come down

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<sup>11</sup> Matthew 3:2, 4:17.

<sup>12</sup> Mark 8:34.

<sup>13</sup> Mark 8:35.

<sup>14</sup> John 12:25.

from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me; and this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up at the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him [or her] up at the last day.”<sup>15</sup>

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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<sup>15</sup> John 6:38–40. The Greek is inclusive.