Lent 2B 2021 A Suffering Christ was necessary for eternal joy

Romans 5: 1 – 11 Mark 8: 27 – 38

When Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ, it marked the first time that any of the disciples said out loud what the angels knew when they announced to the shepherds that Christ the Lord is born. Jesus came into his world. Now we could see what was promised all along. Jesus is the fulfillment of all God’s promises.

Jesus is Christ. Jesus said that Peter was blessed because the heavenly Father had given this revelation to him as He did to His angels.

Jesus is the Christ.

This is the church’s confession. To say it out loud is a most precious gift of God and is revealed to us only by God’s grace. Jesus renamed Simon as Peter, Rock because of it. The church stands upon the rock of confessing Jesus as Christ. And still does.

In the gospel reading for today, Jesus calls Peter Satan. Then Jesus tells him to get out of the way because he is not thinking in the way of God. “*Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”*

Peter had regressed. From A Rock to Satan. His fall was sudden. What a shock! What happened?

There was nothing wrong with Peter’s confession. Jesus is Christ. It was a gift of God. Jesus builds his church upon this confession. Where did Peter go wrong?

His fall lies in the way that Peter and most of his contemporaries understood ***Christ.*** It’s one thing to say Jesus is Christ, it is quite another to define it as God does and not man.

What does it mean? Christ means anointed. It is Greek for the word Messiah. The anointed One of God. Literally it means to pour oil upon the head. That is done to put someone into office. It is the way that God put prophets and kings into their offices or vocations. The English monarchy in the United Kingdom still upholds it at the coronation ceremony.

Christ is then joined to Saviour. He is the one who would save his people. Why he and not she? It is revealed that God has one and only Son. He is the seed that would crush the serpent’s head. He is also son of a woman.

So it comes to the object of saving. From what does the Saviour save his people? Herein lies the answer to Peter’s sudden fall. What do you suppose Peter thought he needed saving from the most?

He and his countrymen had grown so fond of the land and the nation that they wanted their people to be free from Roman occupation. They wanted freedom from Roman rule the most. Therefore, to carry out their plan, only the strongest warrior could defeat such a great army.

Now consider what the angel of the Lord said about Jesus. It happened when Joseph was considering to divorce his wife for getting pregnant by another man. The angel commanded Joseph to take Mary as his wife and to name the child Jesus for he would save his people from **their sins.** Not the Romans. But sins.

When Jesus told Peter that the Christ would suffer and die in a humiliating defeat, it blew his circuits and overthrew his plans for saving the country. Peter felt that Roman occupation was his greatest obstacle to freedom and glory. He forgot just how great his own sins were before God. He was living as if he and his needs mattered most and not what is most important to God.

Then comes our natural inclination to avoid suffering. No one wants pain. Our nervous systems are programmed to remove and end pain. You don’t have to think about removing your hand from a hot burner. Suffering is not normal nor is it wanted.

We naturally avoid suffering and strive to save our lives.

Every living thing on earth wants to keep on living. Avoiding death is what people strive for. **Except** for those who have been given faith by the heavenly Father. What? Is that true? Don’t Christians too want to avoid death? Don’t we want to stay alive as long as we can like anybody else?

That depends on how you understand life and how you understand death. Whose life are you living? Well, mine of course. No one else can live my life, can they? If my life is my own, then I will try to save it. Innately, I will avoid suffering and do everything in my power to stay healthy and live my life.

Now hear what the Lord, the Christ says: *whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.* Christ is not speaking against a healthy diet or exercise. He is not against it, nor against medicine. These are still his gifts.

He is speaking of what is most important. Of what is eternal. What is God’s way of thinking and not ours when it comes to life and death?

For Peter, his nation’s freedom and glory outranked his need for forgiveness. What might outrank our need to be forgiven? A healthy body and mind? Enough money to live up to our comfort levels?

We take our sin lightly when we **save** ourselves rather than **lose** ourselves.

God says that we have no strength of ourselves. We have no ability to extend our lives nor to defend ourselves against evil. No one can avoid death. It comes to all who are sinful. We are no better than Peter. We too have fallen by forgetting what God has said and lived as if we have mattered most.

Christ’s sufferings were necessary to forgive us because no one else was worthy.

Only a pure and holy Christ could take the place of sinful humanity. He took his blood before His father as the ransom for humanity. He avoided Satan’s temptation to avoid the cross. Jesus willingly carried his cross. He exchanged his death for our life! Our life is not our own. We were freed from death and live his life.

From the moment we were baptized until our last gasp of air, we belong to him. Death stands conquered by Christ. Nothing can separate us now from him. Not death, nor devils.

Being forgiven by him, gives us peace. This is more than having a peaceful heart and avoiding anxious feelings, but it means a peace where it is most important and eternal. Jesus has given us peace with his father. You are no longer God’s enemies but friends. Jesus died for God’s enemies and through his suffering and death made you God’s friends.

*While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since therefore we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.*

Blessed are you who are not offended by Christ’s suffering and death but rejoice in that God has saved you and claimed you as his in holy baptism. Now that we are forgiven and free, God does something else unexpected. Our lives are not pain free, nor are Christians exempt from suffering.

God’s love is so different than what we imagine. In love, God fits his beloved with a cross and says to us: Carry this cross that I have made for you. A cross leads to death. It is always the place where death swallows up life. So why would God give us crosses?

Again, we lose sight if we think in our terms instead of hearing what God says. Jesus is the Christ and his cross is where he was crowned king of glory. All who belong to Him are given crosses too. Our Christian suffering happens when we speak of God’s goodness in the face of evil. All suffering for Christ’s sake is a cross.

But Jesus turns our suffering into joy. He gives us a new way of looking at our suffering for Him. It is a privilege. It works out our hope of eternal life. It is a constant reminder of to whom we belong and whose life we are living. It is all blessing.

Suffering for Christ is not a sign of God’s anger or abandonment, but the way to eternal joy. Christ’s suffering and his cross, is the way that God is with you, through all your suffering and in the hour of death. A suffering Christ leads you to eternal joy!