

Matthew 16:21-24

August 30, 2020

Simon says stand up. Simon says run in place. Sit down. And it is here that most are out of the game. You know the rules to Simon Says. You're okay as long as you do what Simon says to do. But if you fail to do what Simon says to do, or do something that Simon does not say to do, game over for you.

In our text we see the game being played, sort of. Jesus shows His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem to suffer, and be killed, and be raised. And then He hears a voice: Simon says No, don't do it. "*This shall never happen to You!*" But Jesus disobeys Simon Peter. "*Out of My sight!*" He tells him, "*You are a stumbling block to Me.*"

It appears that Jesus is changing the rules of the game. But where's the fun in that? We like to do what Simon says. Yet, this is no innocent child's game that we are speaking of now. For Jesus unmask's Simon to reveal his true identity. It is Satan speaking through Simon Peter. It is Satan wanting to keep Jesus away from the sufferings and death of the cross.

But He must go there. It is absolutely necessary. Our salvation depends on it, for all have sinned, and no one can pay the price of their redemption. And so Jesus says No to Simon, and He teaches us to say No.

Yet this is no easy task. It is hard to set our minds on the things of God and not on ourselves. It is difficult to deny ourself and take up our cross to follow Jesus. It is much easier to do what Simon, or should I say what Satan says to do. Satan wanted to remove the cross from Jesus, and he wants to remove the cross of Jesus from you. He wants your life to revolve around you, not around Jesus. Satan wants you to have the attitude: If it feels good, do it, and to always listen to your heart. The last thing he wants is for you to deny yourself, submitting your will to God's will, picking up your cross and following Jesus.

Take a look at our society right now. About the last thing we see are people denying themselves. I do not need to go into the graphic details. It's all about me and what I want out there. But it's not just out there, is it? It's in here. In my heart and in yours. We were born doing what Simon says. And it is still part of our nature. We want God to surrender His will to ours, not our will to His. But our will flows out of our sinful heart. What we want and desire, if it controlled us completely, would completely separate us from God forever.

How, then, do we keep our will in subjection and say No to our sinful desires? The great church theologian, St. Augustine, did. Shortly after his conversion to the Christian faith, he was accosted on the street by a former mistress. He saw her and turned to walk in the other direction. Surprised, the woman called out, "Augustine, it is I!" But continuing on his way without turning around, Augustine called back, "Yes, but it is not I."

And so with us. Because you are in Christ, baptized into Him, which was your conversion, you can say, "*It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.*" And so how can I say Yes to what I want and No to Jesus, when He said Yes to me? Jesus never turned back. He kept His eyes on the cross. He denied Himself completely for you and me and became our redemption price.

When a couple has their first child, they quickly learn what it means to deny themselves. Their life now revolves around their child. They no longer do whatever they like. No more sleeping through the night, or spending their time and money on what they want. They must say No to themselves day after day to say Yes to their child.

And yet they do this out of love. And it's the same with us. Jesus is the Child that God has given to us. Out of love for what He did for us, sacrificing Himself on the cross to save us from the condemnation of hell, we now for His sake say No to what our flesh wants and live for Jesus.

But sometimes young parents complain, don't they? Their child can be so demanding and require way too much attention. It's a commitment, denying themselves. And there are days when they need to be reminded that that little child of theirs is not a burden, but a joy, an absolute joy.

Is Jesus such a joy to you? If He isn't, you will not deny yourself for His sake. Your life will not revolve around Him. But that's how the world lives. In your baptism you were called out of the world. And in your baptism you are assured that you are a joy to Jesus. He rebuked Satan there in those waters for you. "*Get behind Me, Satan!*" He commanded, "Get behind this precious child of Mine!" And do you know that every single day you have the privilege of remembering your baptism and repeating those words? "*Get behind me, Satan!*" you can say every day, "for I am baptized into Christ."

And he must obey. Not you, but obey Jesus to whom you are united in Holy Baptism. Satan cannot force you to follow Him, for Jesus is the one who leads you now. Satan cannot subject your will to his, for you pray daily to your Lord, "*Thy will be done.*" And what Satan says, through all the Simon Peters in your life, you can tune out and walk away in the other direction. It is because you belong to Jesus, and "*My sheep,*" He says, "are the ones who *hear My voice.*"

Satan hates the cross, and he hates baptism because here in these holy things is forgiveness, life, and salvation for you. But no matter what Simon says, Jesus says that you, dear sinner, are forgiven. Everyone of you is forgiven, and nothing you have done can change that. Satan could not keep Jesus from dying on the cross for you. He tried, but Jesus put him in his place. And so your place is always with Jesus. Amen.