

**Mark 8:27-38**

It did not happen, and if it had we would have been shocked. While we were singing, “Lift High the Cross,” if someone would have stood up, waved their hands, and yelled at us to stop. It did not happen here, but it did happen to Jesus. He was lifting high the cross, telling His disciples that He had to suffer, be rejected, be killed, and rise again after three days. Peter took Him aside and rebuked Him. If it had been up to Peter, we would not be singing, “Lift High the Cross”...not today, not ever...because there would be no cross. But with no cross there would be no Lent, no Good Friday, no Easter. With no cross there would be no Baptism, no Holy Communion, no Gospel, no forgiveness. Do you see why Jesus rebuked Peter? - telling him to his face, before all the disciples, “Get behind Me, Satan!”

Had this taken place in today’s society, and word of it leaked out...and you can be sure that it would...Jesus would have been forced to take a sensitivity class. It is socially unacceptable to call someone the devil to their face. But Peter deserved it...and so do I. Whenever I set my mind, not on the things of God, but on the things of man, I need to be rebuked as Peter was. I cannot stop Jesus from reaching the cross as Peter attempted to do, but whenever I prevent the cross from reaching you I need to be rebuked as he was.

I speak here in the first person because I want it to be clear that whatever I preach to you, I preach to myself. When God’s Law accuses you, it accuses me first. Peter lives within my heart just as he lives within yours. And today, with this text before us, it is time for us to admit this.

Let me begin with myself. In my preaching and teaching whenever I do not lift high the cross, Jesus’ words to Peter apply to me: “Get behind Me, Satan!” To lift high the cross does not mean that I dispense with the preaching of the Law and give you only Gospel, but if the Law predominates, if I try to change your behavior not with the Gospel, but with the Law, if you leave the House of God with guilt because I failed to preach Christ Crucified for you, then I deserve Jesus’ words: “Get behind Me, Satan!” If I was perfect, these things would never happen. But as a sinner through and through, I need Jesus’ rebuke and I need it often.

And so do you. Parents, whenever you do not lift high the cross, failing to let Jesus’ Gospel predominate in your home, failing to bring your children faithfully to where Jesus places His cross for them--in Baptism, in Catechism instruction, in worship--Jesus’ words apply to you: “Get behind Me, Satan!” Dear members of the congregation, whenever you treat each other as if Jesus was not lifted high on His cross, failing to forgive each other, failing to let His love shape your life, His words apply to you: “Get behind Me, Satan!” And if you were perfect members and parents, these things would never happen. But as sinners through and through, you need Jesus’ rebuke and you need it often.

But the truth is that we do not like to be rebuked. I do not imagine Peter cared much for it, and neither do we. And so we have the tendency to turn Jesus’ rebuke around. We hear His words, “Get behind Me, Satan!” but we change the words to, “Get behind me, Jesus!” Whenever we disregard Jesus’ rebuke we are saying, “Get behind me, Jesus!” Our sinful flesh does not like to be told what to do. We have adopted the “pro-choice” stance of the sinful world around us...“It’s my life and I’ll live it how I please, so get behind me, Jesus! Get out of my way.” Jesus calls upon us to deny ourselves, to take up our cross and follow Him, to crucify the flesh, to not let the Old Adam in us have its selfish way. But day after day we ignore our Lord and say, “Get behind me, Jesus!”

But the good news for us is that He does not. He would not allow Peter to keep Him from the cross, and He does not allow our sinful flesh to keep Him and His cross from us. For Jesus to reach the

cross, He had to battle His way there. At His birth Satan, through Herod, was already trying to prevent it from taking place. In the desert Satan tempted Jesus to avoid the way of the cross and take the path of glory, not the path of suffering. But Jesus would have none of that. His words to the devil then were much the same as His words to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan!"

And so Satan made His way to the cross as rough as possible. Jesus was rejected by one follower after another. One day as He was teaching (in John 6), the entire assembly got up and walked out on Him. All the leaders hated Him and wanted Him dead. Even His chosen Twelve rejected Him in the Garden of Gethsemane. They left Him all alone with His enemies. Rejection, suffering, facing death by crucifixion... anyone else would have said, "This ain't worth it!" and walked away. But Jesus was determined. It was a bloodbath, and the blood was all His, but He stayed the course. He reached the cross and there He died for you.

And if you think that He who fought so hard to reach the cross for you will give up on you today, think again! He takes our rejection today and He keeps on reaching for you with His mercy. He takes our abuse, our selfish ways, and He does not stop battling for your eternal soul. In spite of my sins and weaknesses, Jesus works to reach you with His love through the words put into your ears and hearts. In spite of parents who fail to lift high the cross for their children, Jesus battles to reach those children anyway, working through faithful grandparents and other family members, and through Christian friends and teachers. And in spite of our feeble attempts to lift high the cross here at Christ Lutheran Church, Jesus is at work here reaching you with His grace.

He does not allow our failures to stop Him from embracing you in mercy. Nothing could prevent Him from dying for you, and nothing prevents Him from showing you His nail-pierced hands today. He forgives you even though you have failed miserably to lift high the cross. He forgives you even though your love and mine is far from perfect. He forgives you, and Satan cannot stop it. Right here in His Sacrament for you He brings His cross to you. He who died for you is here under bread and wine for you to eat and drink. Here he shows you His hands and His side. Here His life-giving blood, poured out for you on the cross, is given to you for the remission of all your sins.

And through this Sacrament working in you, Jesus helps you to lift high the cross in your life. Jesus helps you to forgive those who anger you. Jesus helps you to say, "No!" to your sinful flesh. He helps you to carry your cross and follow Him. Jesus will simply not get behind you. He loves you too much to watch you charge through life away from Him. He is your loving Savior today, tomorrow, and always. Amen.