

Order of Worship for September 3, 2023

Prelude

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

Opening Hymn: *"From All That Dwell Below the Skies"* – Hymn #816

Confession and Forgiveness:

P: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

P: "Take up your cross and follow me," the Savior said.

P: O God, in your kindness, have pity.

C: O God, in your mercy, wash away our sins. Wash us clean of sin and guilt, the sins that we cannot forget and those we cannot remember. For we have disobeyed you and done wrong; we deserve your punishment. For the sake of Jesus Christ, turn your eyes from our iniquity, and cover our guilt, that we may know again the joy of your salvation.

P: Jesus Christ never sinned. But God placed our sins upon him, so that Christ could make us acceptable to God.

C: All we, like sheep, have gone astray; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

P: Those who lose their lives for Christ's sake will save them. Because Jesus took up his cross, our sins are forgiven.

C: Thanks be to God. Amen.

Service of the Word

Entrance Psalm:

P: Delight yourself in the LORD,

C: and He will give you the desires of your heart.

P: Commit your way to the LORD;

C: trust in Him, and He will act.

P: He will bring forth your righteousness as the light,

C: and your justice as the noonday.

P: Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for Him;

C: fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices.

**All: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

P: Delight yourself in the LORD,

C: and He will give you the desires of your heart.

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, Your Son willingly endured the agony and shame of the cross for our redemption. Grant us courage to take up our cross daily and follow Him wherever He leads; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen

Old Testament Lesson: Jeremiah 15:15-21

R: O LORD, You know; remember me and visit me, and take vengeance for me on my persecutors. In Your forbearance take me not away; know that for Your sake I bear reproach. Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by Your name, O LORD, God of hosts. I did not sit in the company of revelers, nor did I rejoice; I sat alone, because Your hand was upon me, for You had filled me with indignation. Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Will You be to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail? Therefore thus says the LORD: "If you return, I will restore you, and you shall stand before Me. If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall be as My mouth. They shall turn to you, but you shall not turn to them. And I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you to save you and deliver you, declares the LORD. I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless."

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Epistle Lesson: Romans 12:9-21

R: Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord." To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Holy Gospel: Matthew 16:21-28

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the sixteenth chapter.

C: Glory to You, O Lord.

P: From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord! This shall never happen to You." But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a hindrance to Me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." Then Jesus told His disciples, "If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will repay each person according to what he has done. Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

P: This is the Gospel of the Lord

C: Praise to You, O Christ.

Sermon Hymn: "*'Come, Follow Me,' the Savior Spake*" - **Hymn #688 vs. 1-4**

Sermon: "*Following Christ*" - **Matthew 16:21-28**

Taking up a cross. Do you bear a cross? Think of a person who has a crippling disease. Or a wife who patiently puts up with an abusive husband. Or an employee who works hard to bring home a paycheck to feed the family. Or parents who deal with a troubled child. Aren't these people who bear a cross?

Jesus says, "If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me." Jesus didn't say "bear" a cross, but "take up" a cross. When we bear a cross, it is something that happens to us. We aren't looking for it. It is something put on us. We are passive. But if we "take up" a cross, we make a choice. We are active. If we follow Jesus, then we are deciding each day to take up that cross. If I develop cancer or have a cruel spouse or a difficult child or a handicap, those are things that have happened to me. I didn't choose those things. They happened. And I can have those problems whether or not I follow Jesus. So what is the cross we "take up"?

Jesus was telling this to His disciples. He had just asked them, "Who do you say I am?" They answered, "Elijah, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, or one of the prophets." Then when Jesus asked them, "Who do you say I am?" Peter replied. "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Then Jesus told them He was going to be arrested and crucified. When Peter heard this he said, "This cannot be." But Jesus quickly quieted Peter and said, "If anyone comes after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow

Me. Whoever wants to save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for My sake will gain it.”

For Jesus’ disciples the cross meant exactly that. Peter, according to tradition, was crucified up-side-down. Others were stoned or flayed alive. St. Paul was probably spared crucifixion because he was a Roman citizen. Most scholars believe he was beheaded. But we live in a society in which we won’t be executed or even put in prison because we follow Jesus. What cross do we have to take up?

A car hit a pedestrian on a road in Hartford, Connecticut. That car and two others that passed the man kept going. Then for two minutes nobody stopped to help him until a police car came. We might think, “That wouldn’t happen here in Iowa.”

In 1964 an even worse incident took place. A woman named Kitty Genovese was brutally stabbed to death for a period of over 30 minutes in New York, even though 38 other neighbors witnessed it.

After the incident people asked, “How could this happen?” One main theory that came out was the claim that in this impersonal, complex world people have to keep to themselves to survive. Think of what would happen if we got personally involved in all the bad news we hear on TV. We’d go nuts. So to survive people have to be like the Pink Floyd song says, “Comfortably Numb.”

That all sounded good until researchers at Columbia University studied the “bystander problem.” They put a student in a room with others. This student faked an epileptic seizure. If only one person was in the room with that student, the person would rush to help 85% of the time. But in a group of four, only 31% of the time they responded. The scientists also did an experiment with smoke coming under a door. 73% responded by themselves, but only 38% with a group. The researchers concluded that it wasn’t the severity of the crisis, the degree the person screamed for help, the character of the witnesses—black, white, young, old, male, female. What mattered is how many witnesses there were.

In our world we hear of so many agencies that help people. And we pay so much in taxes to support the government. So it is easy to say, “Let someone else do it.” If there is a cross for us to take up today, it is the cross of doing something with our faith in the midst of all the watching crowds.

Will we take up that cross? In the ancient world the Church brought a stop to the killing of infants, liberated slaves, and created hospitals, orphanages, and schools. In the middle ages the Church kept classical learning alive and formed universities. In the modern world the Church led the way in the development of science and political and economic freedom. But what will we do today?

Jesus didn't just bear a cross. He took it up. He came to this world not just to be the Son of God, but to take upon Himself the sin of the world. No one forced Him to do that. No, He willingly took up His cross for you and me.

And that is what leads us to take up our crosses. We may think there are other people to help those in need. But the reality is that so many are alone or are convinced they are. Older people are forgotten by their families in nursing homes. Retired neighbors are in a jam because they didn't plan for their benefits to support them in the rising cost of living now that they are late into their eighties. Over half of our children are raised at least part of their childhood with only one parent. They need adults to help mentor them.

A former missionary to Nigeria, Africa told about a Nigerian man named Chinedu who he met in the US. Chinedu asked for his help saying, "I am terribly confused about Christianity. I thought I knew what it was six months ago when I came here, but now I'm not so sure." He went on, "I came from a pagan family. My father was a priest, but ten years ago we became Christians. We understood Christianity as a change in loyalty. We always believed that spiritual things were first in life, but we realized we were loyal to the wrong gods. We place the Triune God as the center of our lives. But after being here I am confused. Christianity seems to be not a change in loyalty, but a change in paradigm.

Now the missionary was confused. He asked, "What do you mean Chinedu?"

Chinedu replied, "In Africa we take for granted that spiritual things are at the center of life. Here spiritual things are taken out of the center and put at the edge of life. The new model *SPECL*.

"What is *SPECL*?" the missionary asked.

Chinedu answered, "*SPECL* stands for success, progress, education, collecting, and leisure."

The missionary realized that Chinedu needed a Christian who was transparent, someone who could show that Chinedu's view, not the view often present in our culture, is the true view of Christianity.

That is the cross we can take up today, the cross of showing the world what it truly means to follow Jesus.

Hymn: "'Come, Follow Me,' the Savior Spake" - Hymn #688 vs. 5

Sixth and Seventh Petitions of the Lord's Prayer

Prayer of the Church:

P: Lord, in Your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

Sharing Our Ministry

Offering/Voluntary:

Service of the Sacrament

Prayer of Thanksgiving:

P:

C:Amen.

Words of our Lord

Lord's Prayer

P: The peace of the Lord be with you always.

C: Amen.

Distribution Hymns:

"Take My Life and Let It Be" – **Hymn #783**

"Let Us Ever Walk with Jesus" – **Hymn #685**

Song After Communion:

Prayer After Communion:

P:

C: Amen.

Blessing: (Pastor)

C: Amen.

Closing Hymn: "Jesus, Lead Thou On" – Hymn #718

Postlude

