

I come to you in the name of one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We open today with Jesus quite openly sharing the fate that awaits him. This is shocking, and more than a little strange. Why would a man, a teacher, a prophet, a man who some are coming to believe is the savior, the king, why would he be so blatantly describing his death, a death by betrayal, by the very people he's ministering to?

Obviously this is peculiar behavior, we just have to look to Peter's reaction to know that what Jesus is doing today is not common. Peter pulls him aside, begins to rebuke him, likely saying, "Dude, what are you doing?! Don't kill this movement before its ever had a chance to get going! Think about the work we're doing, think about the healing we can do, think about the kingdom you will bring, supplanting the rule of the Roman authorities! This is our chance! This is our destiny!"

"GET. BEHIND ME. SATAN."

"For you are setting your mind not on divine things, but on human things."

We tend to do that, don't we?

There's a reason why Peter is often put up as a foil for us the reader, a reason why we like to give Peter a hard time when we talk about his constant and consistent foibles, it's because Peter is us, it's because Peter is like holding a mirror up to faithful people who try real hard and often completely miss the mark. It's because we too set our mind not on divine things but on human things.

There's a lot of issues in this world. We have political issues. We have social issues. We have health and health access issues. We have food and water and disease issues. And a lot of our issues boil down to the fact that we set our mind on human things, on human

needs, human desires, human solutions, forsaking the divine gift of grace that awaits us. Now for the potentially controversial part of my sermon, we can't just talk about these things in the abstract. We have to name them. We have to explore them. And, we have to ask ourselves if our issues, if our staunchly held beliefs are of human things or are our minds set on the divine.

Clearly I can't name every human issue that we have, but there are some very prominent issues that are currently at the forefront of our public consciousness. LGBTQ+ rights are an issue that causes deep divides, fear, and anger. In particular Trans rights, even for something as simple as using the bathroom, has created much uproar and division in our communities. But why? If our minds were on divine things, would we not be thinking of love your neighbor? And certainly if that was at the forefront of our minds, we would accept our trans (and LGBTQ+) brothers and sisters for who they are, no question, no concern.

Even more timely is the discussion we have had in the past 10 days (once again) around gun control, gun access reform, and the power of the NRA. If we have our minds on divine things would we not have on our minds again love your neighbor, but also thou shall not murder, thou shall not worship false idols? If these three points started every conversation around guns and gun control, I don't think we would have this issue much longer. For if we put aside the human things of a "right to bear arms" and focused on the divine, we would gladly give up our guns, we would embrace the making of swords into plowshares, we would embrace God's grace, God's love, establishing a kingdom where no weapon is necessary.

Even bringing up these two issues points to a third that has generated heat, generated anger, and hopefully will stimulate real conversation about this concept: what does it mean to hear “politics” coming out of the pulpit. Where does that line between what is human things and divine things exist when we live in a world, in a society, that celebrates and rejoices in the human things? In preaching the Good News of Christ, particularly how that good news relates to our experience of this human things focused society right here and right now, is it responsible for the preacher to not discuss those human things that draw us away from God? Is it not the responsibility of the congregation to rebuke the preacher when they fail to do so, because it’s safe, because it neglects the deepness of the gospel message, because it is the work of Satan that tells us we can’t ruffle feathers, we can’t cause discomfort, we can’t challenge each other to truly hear Christ.

It is the next part of today’s gospel that lays out the challenge we have before us in setting our mind on the divine and giving up our incessant love of all things we do as human beings, especially proud of when we accomplish it as an “individual.”

Jesus said, ““If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” Deny themselves. Give up their long-held beliefs. Give up their human-given rights. Give up. And in giving up, take up. Take up the cross. Follow. Take up the divine and know that the human things only serve to distract, to detract from our experience of and connection to God. There’s a reason why we hear the lessons we do in each church season. Give up is *a* theme of this season. Take up is *the* theme of this season.

But this is a hard ask. This goes against everything we know. This goes against everything we hold dear in our society, in our comfort and our privilege, in the nerve we have to rebuke others for challenging those human things we cannot let go, because they define us, because they shape us, because they appear to comfort us, and yet leave us feeling so empty inside. How else could we describe the feeling we must have when Jesus rebukes us, even today, especially today, when he says, “Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

We are today the adulterous and sinful generation. We still can't get past those human things to turn to divine things. I mean, I wouldn't really have a job if we had...

But that is why we're here. That's why we read and re-read these gospel stories, these letters, these books of our tradition, these songs of our faith. It's because we do struggle with this. It's why we relate so much to Peter. It's why we struggle with complex emotions and reactions to the news of our day.

I found myself this week experiencing this same struggle with the news of the death of Billy Graham and the reaction he has received, the honor of laying in the US Capital, and the numerous faith leaders, including our own Archbishop of Canterbury, praising the work Graham did in spreading the faith. But my knowledge and experience of Graham was only that of the Graham that fought so ardently to diminish, to spread hate, to actively harm in the ardent support of conversion therapy, against our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters. This was a Graham of vitriol that made being Christian an embarrassment at best. At worst, this was a man that nearly single handedly drove millions out of the church, ostracized

them from their families, and because community was no longer present, indirectly created the epidemic of homelessness and suicide among LGBTQ+ youth.

It's been hard for me to balance these two pictures of Graham, to balance my own understanding of the resurrection and God's grace, my own understanding of our promise of eternal salvation. It took the headline of an article from satire news site *The Onion* to remind me of today's central lesson, "Panicked Billy Graham Realizes He Took Wrong Turn Into Heaven's Largest Gay Neighborhood." Regardless of our focus on those human things, regardless of the times we all fail to see that our words and anger are keeping us from connecting to the holy, regardless of any damage we may do to others, directly and indirectly, God's grace is waiting for us if we take up the cross. God's grace is waiting to welcome us all into heaven for a life well-attempted, attempted to the best of our abilities, attempted to the best of our knowledge and understanding, attempted and often failed but through God's grace recognized, acknowledged, forgiven, and received into life eternal.

Take up, and in taking up, give up the human things. Give up the division, the pain, the anger. Acknowledge them. Acknowledge that this exists. But then, take up the cross. Deny yourself and take up the cross. Take up the mantle of Christ and love your neighbor. And, when necessary, be ready to rebuke those (especially when it is yourself) who put human over divine with a timely "Get behind me, Satan."

Amen.