



Preach **Matthew**

Personal reflection

(Year A Proper 17)

Matthew 16:21-28

Part two of a personal reflection for those preaching as part of Giving in Grace

Matthew 16:21-28 (NIV) Peter's rebuke

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples, that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the laws, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"

Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. I tell you the truth some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

This paper is the second part of a two part personal reflection for those preaching as part of Giving in Grace in the local church. It is based upon the story of Peter's rebuke, the strong words of Jesus addressed to the disciple who has just declared him as Messiah and Lord.

Matthew's use of the phrase *apo tote*, loosely translated as "from that time on" has immediate reference back to Peter's confession in 16:13-20. The same phrase is used by Matthew in 4:17 and, as there indicates the beginning of a new phase in Jesus ministry and his relationship with his disciples. Matthew underlines that he is interested in this by

replacing Mark's indirect "them" with the more definite *mathētes*, (disciples) in verse 21. It is interesting also that Matthew changes Mark's verb *didaskēin* (teach) with the richer word *deiknuein* – to show. What creates this newness in Jesus relationship with his disciples is Peter's God gifted confession of Jesus as Messiah. How are we to understand this?

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Peter's desire to protect Jesus is really about protecting himself.

At the crossroads

Peter had been journeying with Jesus for perhaps three years and in that time he has come



to know Jesus as healer, teacher, compassionate carer and prophet. His insight that Jesus is Messiah and Son of God arises from the authenticity of that relationship. Effective discipleship in the church begins with building relationships and affirming people’s journey, their story so far and with welcoming, accepting and belonging.

Peter’s confession is not the end of his journey of discipleship but a crossroads. A maturing relationship involves the acknowledgement of the lordship of Jesus and an understanding of what that means. It is here that Peter wants to turn left or right because a suffering messiah was incomprehensible to him. For Jesus true discipleship means a place for suffering, death and resurrection. We do not seek these things out for their own sake but following Jesus some things will hurt, some things will cost us dearly.

This teaching of Jesus is no more attractive to us and the possibilities of our misunderstanding are no less real. We would be foolish to start a serious journey unprepared. But many Christians set out on their journey of faith with no idea that it might get rough and that something might be required of them.

Protecting ourselves

Peter’s response to Jesus teaching about suffering is swift and predictable and Jesus’ reply no less compromising, “Get behind me, Satan”. On the surface Peter’s concern is for Jesus safety and we have no reason to doubt that he meant what he said. At a deeper level,

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however, Peter’s desire to protect Jesus is really about protecting himself. Peter does not want Jesus to suffer because he does not want to suffer himself. And so, like the devil before him he holds out to Jesus once again the possibility of victory without the cross, of son-ship without obedience.

We must be careful of our teaching at this point. There is no virtue in suffering in itself; indeed Jesus taught us to pray to be delivered from the time of trial. The real issue is - who is at the centre of our lives? Is the core of our lives the lordship of Christ and all that obedience requires or is it our own self-preservation and protection? Matthew makes it clear what drives Jesus at this point in the journey to Jerusalem. He uses the single word *dei* (it is necessary) to govern the four verbs in the sentence – to journey, suffer, die and rise – in expressing the divine necessity of Jesus actions.

Stumbling block

The scene in Matthew is dramatic – “get behind me, Satan”. We can perhaps picture Peter physically standing on the road between Jesus and Jerusalem and being ordered out of the way. With the privilege of insight comes an awesome responsibility. The sadness is that the one whose confession introduces newness into Jesus teaching is now the one who is a stumbling block, in the way of the mission and purpose of God. That is what discipleship without obedience will do.

Stewardship reflections

Issues around financial stewardship pose the question of discipleship in a most pointed way. Christians who in so many areas are faithful and blessed instinctively





want to avoid this money issue. We deceive ourselves that we have nothing to give or that we and the congregation are giving all that we can. Clergy, anxious about raising a potentially disruptive personal matter, uncertain how to speak about or unsure of their own response can find themselves colluding with this deception.

Many of us have spent a lifetime securing our family and ourselves by earning and keeping money. Much of our security and self worth is attached to what we have earned. Giving at a level that does not touch us, makes no discernible impact on our thinking or decision making does not address the fundamental question of who is at the centre of our lives. But when we give so that we feel it, give in some manner proportionate to all that God has given to us we affirm the lordship of Christ in our lives. For some Christians their giving is sacrificial; it costs to give in this way, it is noticed and felt. Such sacrificial giving is an expression of faith and joy and trust that we should aspire to. For all of us our giving should be sacramental firstly because the outward act carries a deeper meaning; secondly because in the act itself the reality that it points to in some manner changes and transforms us into the likeness of Christ.

Failure to grasp the nettle of obedience in the area of financial matters is more than a harmless oversight. Across the land churches are running on a shoestring budget with rising deficits and falling reserves. Clergy and finance committees are focusing on reducing costs rather than expanding ministry. Discipleship that does not resource the church's ministry is a stumbling block to the purpose of God.

Is there also an appropriate stewardship task for people in the early and formative stages of discipleship? It is ironic that some parishes shy away from talking money to new people for fear of creating offence yet equally talk of bringing in new people to help balance the books! The truth is that people will not automatically make the connection between discipleship and giving. The key task for teaching stewardship to the fringe of our congregations is to help make that connection in preaching and practice. Encouraging membership of the planned giving scheme is foundational in growing people in the grace of giving – planned giving is the foundation of gracious giving. ■

