

We pick up today with part two of the gospel reading we began last week. You might remember that last week we left Peter flying high after he made his famous recognition of Jesus saying, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood have not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

Peter was certainly flying high and we had fun with the image of his nickname being "rock" and all that stuff. But of course his high flying time was short lived. Immediately after that text we have today's gospel reading and this same "Rock" the church is to be founded upon is being called a "stumbling block for Jesus. Jesus says, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." Talk about a quick fall

from grace! And we not only have this disturbing bit about the guy who's just been given the keys to heaven now being called heaven, there is also this other little detail easily overlooked. That the world of human things is actually Satan's realm. Jesus said, "Get behind me Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." Notice he did not say, "You are setting your mind not on divine things but on *evil* things." That would be an easy thing to accept. We could categorize things as divine or evil and we'd be somewhere in between. But Jesus clearly lumps the human point of view into Satan's point of view. That is a lot harder to accept.

The idea develops in the verses that follow. Jesus says, "If any want to become my followers let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." That's the divine point of view. And for the human point of view Jesus continues, "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

Now we can see a bit of what is going on. God has a plan and God is carrying out that plan. It involves Jesus being

arrested, suffering at the hands of the religious leaders, being beaten, and ultimately being crucified. Peter however, doesn't like that plan. From the human point of view that sounds like a stupid plan. What good can come from being arrested, rejected, beaten and dying? I mean, it can be okay to be arrested for a good cause in order to prove a point I suppose. And it can be okay to be publically humiliated if you can turn it around into shaming your humiliator into improving. But the idea of getting killed after that makes no sense whatsoever. The whole plan is pointless! And so Peter says, "God forbid it Lord. This should never happen to you!"

The problem is that the human point of view is opposed to the divine plan and it is therefore of Satan. Our human plans aren't necessarily wrong because they are human. They are wrong when they insist that their measure of success is the same as God's measure of success.

Imagine being a mid-level manager in a large company and you go to your boss after your unit showed a loss in the last quarter, but everyone expected it to be a profitable quarter for you. And you say to your boss, "We didn't turn a profit last

quarter because it was God's plan not to." How long do you think you'd keep your job? Not very long I'd say.

Do you see how we are driven by the human point of view? Spreadsheets are our measure of whether something is successful or not. Did it turn a profit? How many lost hour injuries were there? Did the new police chief lower crime rates? Is the economic policy good? Did our designs hold up to an earthquake? When the statistics point the right direction we are inclined to call the plan good. And when they are down we call it bad.

It is important to always remember not to push our measures of success on God's plans or reject God's plan because it doesn't look good. God who can bring about resurrection can do anything beyond our measures.

So then what do we do? If we can't dependably measure success based on our own measures how can we know what is good? I think we find a good answer by turning to our second Bible reading for today from Romans 12. And incidentally this is also a good passage to answer the perennial question of Lutherans which is what should we do now?

The biggest weakness of Lutheran theology is that it doesn't answer the question of what do we do now that we know we are saved by grace through faith. We are good at saying you are saved by God's work and not your own. But then we don't know what to do. Many churches say you should do x,y, and z because that's what God wants you to do. But we get uncomfortable with that thinking; aren't you just adding another layer of works righteousness? Aren't you just being Pharisees in Christian clothing? And if you can do the works then you get smug and think you're great like the Pharisees did. But if you can't then you feel guilty and like a failure. So, we Lutherans content ourselves with doing nothing - which isn't right either. But Romans 12 does give us a faithful answer. It's worth reading parts of it again,

"Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

"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; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all."

And one that is very important, "If it is possible, *so far as it depends on you*, live peaceably with all." This is important because it clearly acknowledges that you can't live peaceably with everyone and you aren't necessarily failing when you can't. Also the next bit I think is a lot of fun, "Beloved, never avenge yourselves *but leave room for the wrath of God*..." Don't think that God is ever unaware of innocent suffering. God knows and sees all. Skipping ahead a little bit Paul goes on, "If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

If you want to know God's plan and if you want to know what to do in a situation turn to Romans 12 for the answer. Use that as a lens to view every situation and you will do well. Now, don't expect everyone to agree with you. If you enter the world

of business or politics with that as your creed people will look at you like you are strange. And it certainly won't be a fast track to the top of the corporate ladder, if it moves you up at all. But it is the way of God. And it is the way to true life.

The more you try to hang on to your life the more you will lose it. And the more you give of yourself the more of who you truly are will come about. Live by Romans 12 and you will be more alive than you have ever been before. You will be living as God intended you to live; and that is true life. Amen