

# **Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

## **THE “MUST” OF DIVINE SUFFERING**

**Matthew 16:21-28**

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**Analysis by Norb Kabelitz**

21 From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. 22And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, ‘God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.’ 23But he turned and said to Peter, ‘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.’

24 Then Jesus told his disciples, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 25For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. 26For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? 27’For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. 28Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom

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# DIAGNOSIS: The Human “Must”- Suffering and Loss Must Be Avoided

## **Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *Humiliating and Distasteful!*

It's human nature to identify with Peter's rebuke: "God forbid!" Win or go home! How undignified for God's Christ to suffer and be killed! It must be a bad joke, unbecoming for divinity, distasteful! It is downright humiliating not only for the "Master" but for us who serve Him! We get painted with the same brush as Losers! How can divinity become devil's food by being subjected to religious condemnation in the Name of the Almighty? This cannot, must not, happen! It will discredit the whole movement!

## **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem)** : *Foolish and Unbelievable!*

It is human to avoid unnecessary suffering, to protect one's self, to deny it. We can't believe God's will is the source of such foolishness as death on a cross. Not very smart! God's Messiah should assure divine success. Faithful followers should be able to be optimistic about the leader's mission. We could compete successfully by force of arms or overpowering influence! Shouldn't we be the WalMart of growth and success? All to the glory of God, of course! How can losing be winning?

## **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem)** : *Demonic and Deceitful*

We might win the battle, but lose the war! Jesus suggests it is a demonic lie to seek preservation and short-term gain at the expense of God's redemptive mission. The end result is forfeiture of our lives! Losers! (Does this apply only to our spiritual lives, or could it also apply to churches that spend much on buildings and maintenance to save their lives? More! Why do so many of our leaders seek first the approval of Moses (Law)

on moral issues rather than the Gospel of grace and truth that came in Jesus Christ. We are deceived by thinking that Moses is our “supreme court” whose Law gives us security.)

## **PROGNOSIS: The Divine “Must” of Obedience and Trust**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *The Suffering Servant***

Jesus “began to show” his disciples a “suffering servant.” It is one thing to suffer from opposition, hardship, pain, sickness, death; it is another to suffer for the benefit of another; even the ungodly. Jesus’ suffering is redemptive. Matthew says “ransom” (Matt. 20:28), the exchange of His death, for the lives of many. He is God’s “Ragman,” Walt Wangerin’s description of the Messianic servant, who takes our sin and death, and infuses us with new life energized by His resurrection. He intersects our human minus to connect us to His divinity, vertically crossing our minus. He “emptied Himself to full-fill us.” On Easter Day He continues to “show his disciples” (v. 21). The Emmaus walk shows Good Friday is good because it is God’s Friday and; and His mercy endures forever, because the “Rising Son” is God’s Easter for us.

### **Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Too Good Not to be True!***

We know God best in the human life of Jesus, Son of God, born of Mary. God is revealed in His human life so that out of suffering came healing, and out of death came life and resurrection. Luther said, “If God had come in “power,” He would not have won our hearts! “Lord, I believe, help my unbelief?” My human vision of the divine mission wants to force the coming of the kingdom with the power of politics or sword, or with commercial magnetism, or some goodly social program or some creative and entertaining attraction. But isn’t it inherent in the Gospel that the power of suffering love on behalf of another (for

Christ's sake!) is God's way of promoting trust and "believability," His way to win our hearts?

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : Cross Followers Lose to Find**

Jesus' way spends rather than saves, making others "rich"; His way is ready to lose fame rather than seek honor. He seeks honor for the dishonored. Gregory the Great in the 6th century named his office "The servant of the servants of God." Not bad! Isn't that what Jesus meant about "taking up their cross and following me." Seekers" and "outsiders" may find this merely altruistic. But all who trust the Spirited Messiah, the Christ, the anointed, find in the Chrism of olive oil, God's mission to be "food, light and healing." "Christening" is God's new word that feeds our faith, throws light on God's face, heals and reconciles our debits with God. And more! It certifies a future (vv. 27-28), a bonus of grace and vision of "the Son of Man" at God's "right hand." (On "Kingdom talk" see Ed Schroeder's Thursday Theology #369 of July 7, and #370 of July 14. Very helpful! At [www.Crossings.org](http://www.Crossings.org).)