

**St. Paul Lutheran Church
Grant Park, Illinois
The Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost, September 16, 2018
Isaiah 50:4-10**

The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught. The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back. I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame. He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Let us face each other! Who is my accuser? Let him confront me! It is the Sovereign Lord who helps me. Who is he that will condemn me? They will all wear out like a garment; the moths will eat them up. Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the word of his servant? Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God.

Doing things which are “good” for you is often difficult. A song released about a year ago by country artist Justin Moore entitled, “Kinda Don’t Care” illustrates this fact for me. In the song, Moore expresses the struggle he has doing stuff which is “good” for him., **“I've been watchin' my weight. I've been tryin' to do right. I've been tryin' to get a little more sleep at night. I've been workin' like a dog. I've been goin' to church. Yeah, I've been bein' so (dang) good, it hurts.”**

Moore says it hurts him to be good all the time. What does he want to do instead of being good? **“I kinda wanna light up a couple smokes. Kinda want some Crown mixed in my Coke. Kinda wanna hole up in some corner booth somewhere. I kinda wanna find a pretty little thing. That's kinda like me, don't want no strings. Knowin' in the morinin' that it ain't goin' nowhere. But tonight, I kinda don't care.”** He wants a night where he is bad bad boy.

For me, this song reminds me a lot of human nature and the struggles it has with doing things which are “good” for you. The person who is on a diet which will help them lose weight allows themselves a cheat day where they eat whatever they want. The person who has had a knee replaced only does the easy parts because the hard ones hurt too much. The New Year’s resolution to get more exercise is forgotten after two weeks.

You get the idea. People struggle with doing things that are good for them such as exercise or a diet. Yet, any old person can struggle with these things. We’re Christians who have gathered here. Are there struggles which you and I simply because we are Christians while non-Christians don’t have to face them? The answer is yes there are and these struggles which are unique to Christians are the main focus of our lessons this morning.

Jesus has a label for the struggles each one of us must face because we are Christians. He says it is bearing the cross. Every Christian bears a cross because we follow Christ. Jesus makes the necessity of the cross abundantly clear in our gospel lesson. He says, **“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 and for the gospel will save it.”**

How important is it in Jesus’ eyes to be willing to bear the cross? He says the only way to be a Christian is you must be willing to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow him. Sounds easy, doesn’t it? Sounds like something you want to do, right? You love Jesus. You want to serve him. If he asks me to take up my cross and follow him, then I’m going to do it. I’m going to listen to his call and follow after him because this is the way which leads to salvation.

Yet, are you and I really willing to do what Jesus is asking us to do? Are we really prepared to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow after Jesus? There is part of us which screams out, “Yes, absolutely. I’m ready and willing. Sign me up.” I get it. You love Jesus. You want to serve him and do what is best in his eyes. You’re ready to do it, but what is your success rate when given the chance to deny yourself, pick up your cross and follow after Jesus?

What is your success rate when you’re talking with someone and a name of a person comes up who you both don’t like? And the other person starts tearing into the person you both don’t like. How quick are

you to pick up your cross and deny your desire to join in? How willing are you to stop and correct the other person's sin of destroying a reputation? Or do you reason and say that I've been so good with my speech I deserve a cheat session?

Jesus says he wants you to deny yourself by putting another person and their needs before your own. How willing are you to do that when it hurts your pride and they ask you to take a pay cut at work to keep other people on board? Are you willing to do it or do you say no way? I worked hard for my position and status. It isn't my fault the company mismanaged money. There is no way I'll budge since my family has needs too.

What is your reaction when you don't get your way? Jesus wants us to bear the pain of not getting our way and move on. How good are you at that? Do you grin and bear it? Or do you complain and carry on about it? Do you whine about the fact your life is unfair or you've suffered an injustice? Have you started to feel your skin crawl yet? Or a frustration building inside of you that just wants to be let go? It means you are beginning to understand the cross hurts.

I want to go back to my introduction. The singer was tired of doing "good" things and wanted to give in and do "bad" things for one night. How often don't you and I long to follow the song's example and give in to our sinful nature rather than fighting it because it hurts to be good. Or I'm too tired to fight it. I might as well give in. Sound familiar? It does because it is the struggle which every Christian faces because Jesus said we would. It is in the nature and DNA of being a Christian.

Struggle leaves you exhausted and worn out because you and I don't have the energy to constantly be at war. It just isn't part of who we are. We get tired and worn out and we long for rest from the struggle. Where can we find rest? **"The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary."** Where do we find rest from the struggle with sin? Isaiah points us to the servant of the Lord who has words which sustain the weary.

God's servant is talking in these verses. Listen and see if you hear something incredibly familiar when he speaks. **"The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back. I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting."** What makes these words so familiar? Aren't they familiar because they show us what happened to Jesus during his passion?

Jesus was arrested, beaten, spat on, whipped and mocked. These words all came true and then what did he face? He faced the cross where he faced not only the pain and torture of a terrible death, but he also faced God's full wrath over sins. He faced God's wrath because you choose to bad mouth someone. He faced God's wrath because you're selfish. He faced God's wrath because you don't deny yourself and grumble and complain about things.

What benefit do you receive because Jesus faced God's wrath for you? **"Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame. He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Let us face each other!**

Who is my accuser? Let him confront me! It is the Sovereign Lord who helps me. Who is he that will condemn me? Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the word of his servant?"

"Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God."

Wow, what words of comfort. Jesus set his face like flint to face the cross in order to vindicate you and me in God's sight. How is he able to vindicate you and me? Isaiah says in another part of his book that God laid our sins on his servant. This means when God looks at us he doesn't see us anymore. He sees his servant who stands in between us. What does God see when he looks at his servant?

His servant says no one is able to bring a charge against him. No one is able to condemn him! What do his words mean for you? No one is able to bring a charge against you! No one is able to condemn you! It means you can lean on Jesus because his sacrifice on his cross forgives you for the times you didn't want to carry your cross. You are forgiven for tearing someone down. Your sins of selfishness are forgiven. Your grumbling. Your complaining. Forgiven.

Christ's cross is the reason you are forgiven. It is also the reason he calls you to pick up your own cross and follow after him. We deny ourselves and live the way Jesus wants us to out of thankfulness to him. When we battle our sinful nature and speak well about others, put them first and simply let go of our complaints, it is our way of saying thank you to Jesus. Thank you for carrying your cross on my behalf.

However, our sinful nature hates the cross because it kills the sinful nature which doesn't want to die. This is the reason we struggle as Christians. It takes work to fight the old off. We often long to give in to our sinful nature to kinda not care for a night, but as Christians we don't want give in and we struggle. Struggle hurts and exhausts. It teaches us what Jesus means when he says, **"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."**

Where do you turn when you get tired of carrying your cross? **"Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced. I know I will not be put to shame. He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Who is my accuser? It is the Sovereign Lord who helps me. Who is he that will condemn me? Trust in the name of the Lord and rely on (your) God."** Your cross doesn't bring salvation. Jesus' cross does. His cross will help, sustain and enable you to carry your cross for him. Amen.