

PENTECOST 13
JEREMIAH 15:15-21
ROMANS 12:9-21
MATTHEW 16:21-28
SEPTEMBER 2, 3, 2017

YEAR A

Romans 12:9-13 Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹²Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. ¹³Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

There are many places in Paul's letters where we read that Christ died for us. Romans 5 says that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. He died for us even when we did not deserve it. Jesus died for us that we would have life, health and hope. God sent Jesus because of God's great love for us. Romans 8 says that nothing can separate us from God's love which comes to us through Jesus Christ. John's letters tell us about God's love for us. Since God loved us we ought to love one another. Our love is genuine because we know God's love for us. If our Lord loves us we truly love one another.

Our readings today help us understand God's love. God loved Jeremiah and promised to stay with him and to deliver him from his enemies. Jeremiah needed to keep serving the Lord. He needed to keep declaring the word of the Lord even when persecution came and people tried to destroy him. In Romans 12 Paul tells about God working justice for us so that we can be about the business of loving God's people. Our task is to minister to people in need and pray for our enemies. We do what the Lord calls us to do and we leave the rest to the Lord our God. We do not repay evil for evil. We extend hospitality. Paul says in this reading that our love must be genuine. It must be from the heart and it must be real. You and I serve the Lord by serving others. We serve the Lord when we seek God's will and then do it. We follow the Lord's direction even when it doesn't make sense. We follow where Jesus is leading and we do not deny our faith when things get difficult.

Matthew 16:21-23 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."

Following Jesus is not always pleasant. It is not always easy. Sometimes, being a Christian and following the Lord Jesus is dangerous. The prophet Jeremiah preached to the people in Jerusalem and Judah and found himself in the dungeon, in the cistern and on the outside of the city. Paul preached and taught that Jesus is the Christ and that people are saved by grace through faith. Paul often found himself in prison, beaten and otherwise an outcast. The disciples of our Lord were told that because they were followers they must do certain things. They must believe that Jesus is the Christ. Last week we heard Peter's proclamation that Jesus is the Christ. We heard Jesus tell Peter that it was not flesh and blood that revealed this but that God revealed it through the Holy Spirit. Peter and the others knew that Jesus is the Christ but there is more to discipleship than just knowing. Being a follower of the Lord also requires doing. Because we are followers we also do what our Lord asks us to do. We must believe what the Lord asks us to believe even when we do not want to believe it. We believe God's word to be true even when we do not want it to be true. We pick up our crosses even when we would rather leave them on the ground.

Jesus told his disciples about his suffering and death. He told them that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer at the hands of the leaders of the Jewish religion. He told them about his death but he also gave assurance of life. On the third day he would be raised. For Peter and for most of us this is not news we would want to hear. The thought of Jesus dying was completely off the mark for Peter. It must never happen. Even though Peter's reasons for not wanting this to be true were good, his attitude toward Jesus was not. It is

never good for us to rebuke Jesus. It is never a good idea for us to argue with Jesus. It is OK for us to seek better understanding on the teachings and the direction of the Lord. It is good for us to know more but it is never OK to argue whether something is good or right when we are following the Lord. Sometimes the Lord asks us to do things that make little or no sense but we always follow the Lord.

Matthew 16:24-26 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?

Following the Lord means putting the Lord first. It means denying self and it means taking up the cross. Jesus says that gaining your life means losing it. Jesus does not tell us to go looking for crosses to bear. Jesus did not go looking for a cross to be nailed to. Our Lord could have avoided the cross by changing his message and his ministry but then he could not have been our Messiah and our Savior. Jesus also does not say we should avoid the crosses when we meet them.

Jesus says that losing our lives for the sake of the gospel means finding it. In Matthew 5 Jesus talks about our righteousness exceeding that of the scribes and Pharisees. Righteousness is not so much about doing right things but being in a right relationship. Being in a right relationship means you will do right things. It is about listening to the word of the Lord and following where the Lord is leading. Righteousness is entrusting our lives to the Lord. Righteousness means that we follow in faith where the Lord is leading. It means that we sometimes remain silent when we want to argue with another person who is telling us how stupid we are for being a Christian. The righteousness of God means we speak at the right time trusting that the Holy Spirit will give us the right words to speak. We follow when it is more popular

to not follow. We follow when others tell us we are foolish for following a God we cannot see.

Jesus talks about gaining eternal life by putting the Lord first. Most of us strive for lots of things. Having lots of things must never cause us to compromise our faith in the Lord. We must never cheat our neighbor so that we might get ahead. It is more important for us to love the Lord and to follow God's ways than it is to gain all kinds of material things. We can trust that our Lord enjoys giving us good things. God loves us and wants to provide for us. We walk in faith knowing that God gives us a good direction. We love our neighbor even when our neighbor is our enemy. We pray for those that persecute us.

When your crosses need to be carried remember that God loves you. When you wonder how you are going to make it remember God is providing everything you need and lots of things you want. Trust in the Lord and serve God's people. Let the Lord be your God. AMEN