



SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

September 12, 2021

Three weeks ago, we heard the gospel according to John's version of Peter's confession of faith. This week, we hear the gospel according to Mark's version when Peter says, "You are the Messiah." In John, the stumbling block is Jesus of Nazareth's invitation to eat his flesh, given for the life of the world. In Mark, too, the scandal has to do with Jesus' words about his own coming death, and here Peter himself stumbles over Jesus' words. However, Jesus is anointed (the meaning of "messiah") in Mark only on the way to the cross. We are so anointed in Holy Baptism with the sign of the cross.

Today's prelude is certainly the most famous organ work of the seventeenth century. A prelude for this generation was a multi-partite "essay in sound" that alternated sections in free and strict counterpoint. This particular one utilizes nearly every dramatic gesture available: complicated pedal passages, flashing scales up and down coupled with unexpected chords and sudden silences for acoustical effect. The postlude is the lively opening section of another prelude, the rest of which has been lost.

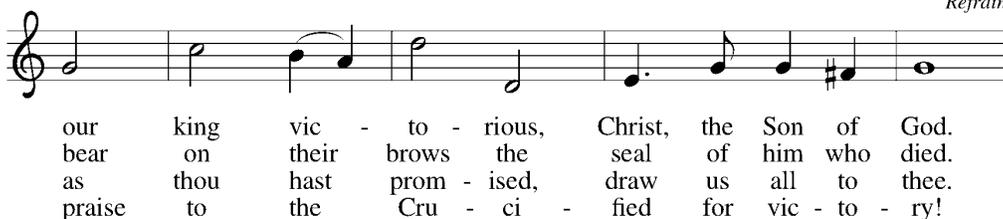
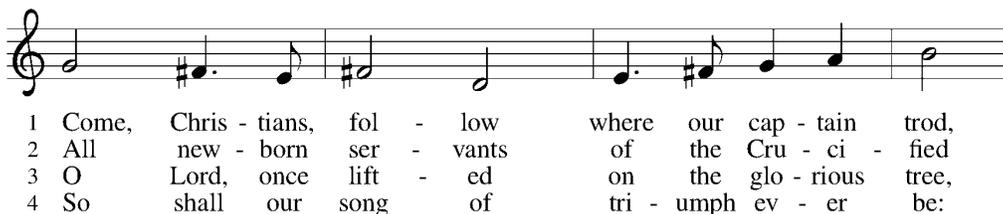
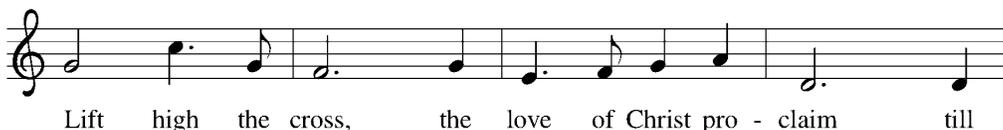
Prelude

Praeludium in C Major

Dieterich Buxtehude
(1637-1707)

Hymn

Lift High the Cross



Text: George W. Kitchin, 1827-1912; rev. Michael R. Newbolt, 1874-1956

Music: CRUCIFER, Sydney H. Nicholson, 1875-1947

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Apostolic Greeting

*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

Prayer of the Day

O God, through suffering and rejection you bring forth our salvation, and by the glory of the cross you transform our lives. Grant that for the sake of the gospel we may turn from the lure of evil, take up our cross, and follow your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen

WE GATHER AROUND THE WORD AND PRAYERS

First Lesson - Isaiah 50:4-9a

The image of the servant of the Lord is one of the notable motifs in the book of Isaiah. Today's reading describes the mission of the servant, whom early Christians associated with Jesus of Nazareth. Like Jesus, the servant does not strike back at his detractors but trusts in God's steadfast love.

⁴The Lord GOD has given me
the tongue of a teacher,
that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word.

Morning by morning he wakens—
wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught.

⁵The Lord GOD has opened my ear,
and I was not rebellious,
I did not turn backward.

⁶I gave my back to those who struck me,
and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard;
I did not hide my face from insult and spitting.

⁷The Lord GOD helps me;
therefore I have not been disgraced;
therefore I have set my face like flint,
and I know that I shall not be put to shame;

⁸he who vindicates me is near.
Who will contend with me?
Let us stand up together.
Who are my adversaries?
Let them confront me.

^{9a}It is the Lord GOD who helps me; who will declare me guilty?

Psalm 116:1-8

This psalm is an offering of thanksgiving and praise by one who has been rescued from death.

¹I love the LORD, because he has heard the voice of my supplication,
because he has inclined his ear to me whenever I called upon him.

²The cords of death entangled me; the grip of the grave took hold of me; I came to grief and sorrow.

³Then I called upon the name of the LORD: "O LORD, I pray you, save my life."

⁴Gracious is the LORD and righteous; our God is full of compassion.

⁵The LORD watches over the innocent; I was brought very low, and he helped me.

⁶Turn again to your rest, O my soul. for the LORD has treated you well.

⁷For you have rescued my life from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from stumbling.

⁸I will walk in the presence of the LORD in the land of the living.

Second Lesson - James 3:1-12

This text uses various images to illustrate how damaging and hurtful the way we speak to and about others can be. Not only are we to control our speech, but what we say and how we say it is to reflect our faith.

¹Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. ²For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle. ³If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. ⁴Or look at ships: though they are so large that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs.

⁵So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! ⁶And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell. ⁷For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, ⁸but no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. ¹⁰From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. ¹¹Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? ¹²Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh.

Holy Gospel - Mark 8:27-38

This story provides the turning point in the gospel according to Mark. Peter is the first human being in the narrative to acknowledge Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, but he cannot accept that as the Messiah Jesus will have to suffer. Moreover, Jesus issues a strong challenge to all by connecting discipleship and the cross.

²⁷Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” ²⁸And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” ²⁹He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” ³⁰And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

³¹Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

³⁴He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”



Sermon

A gaggle of children was playing in a city park when a game of “Follow the Leader” took shape. With one child in the lead and the others following along dutifully, off they went – up and down the slide, around the sandbox, under the swings, through the trees, alongside the tennis courts, through a small stream, and across the open field – waving their arms, jumping up and down, walking on all-fours like animals, weaving side-to-side, and other antics along the way. The children were on the move, content to allow the imagination of the leader to shape their play experience – following in her footsteps for an exciting journey through the wonders of the park.

Now, being a *follower* is not something that our culture really encourages. After all, when have you ever heard a commencement speaker challenge graduates to become the “*followers* of tomorrow”, or watched a biographical film or documentary about great world *followers*? Awards are not given out to recognize and honor community *followers*. Résumés don’t highlight a job applicant’s “*followership*” skills, because our culture emphasizes *leadership*.

Yet, it is how to be a *follower* that is a prominent theme in our gospel reading this morning. On the way to Caesarea Philippi, Jesus of Nazareth asks his disciples – his *followers* – a question about how people in the Galilee are perceiving him. “Who do people say that I am?” Jesus asks. After responses such as “John the Baptist,” or “Elijah,” or “one of the prophets,” Jesus asks his followers, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter is then portrayed making his confession, his affirmation, of Jesus as “the Messiah” – God’s anointed one.

However, as Peter finds out, one can have the correct answer and still not really understand anything about that answer. Just a few verses later, Peter pulls Jesus aside and rebukes him for saying all this stuff about the Messiah having to suffer and be rejected and killed. But Jesus is having none of it and rebukes Peter right back: “Get behind me, Satan!” (meaning adversary, or deceiver, or tempter) “For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” Jesus then calls the crowd, with his disciples, and says to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?”

This pointed, back-and-forth scene serves to prompt **our own** reflection on our Lord’s “Who do **YOU** say that I am?” question, because we have to admit that Peter’s definition of “Messiah” is probably the one we prefer as well – a strong God, a God who heals our illnesses, provides ample prosperity, guarantees our security, and generally keeps us happy, healthy, and wise. But that’s not what Jesus of Nazareth offers. Instead, he points to a God who meets us in our vulnerability, in our suffering, in our losses. He points to a God who meets us in those moments when we really need God, when all we have worked for, hoped for, and striven for, falls apart and we realize that we are mortal, incapable of saving ourselves. Our Lord’s identity proves elusive precisely because God shows up in places where we least expect God to be, which means that we may not get the God we want, but instead the God we need.

All too often, we hear Jesus’ language about cross-bearing and denial through the lens of something like a diet plan: have a little less of the things we like, don’t overindulge in the things that make us happy, cut enjoyment calories whenever possible. However, that’s not what Jesus is talking about at all. He’s suggesting that the “life” that is packaged and sold to us by the standards of our culture isn’t “real” life, and that we need to die to those illusions before we can be born into the *abundant* life God wants for us.

Here’s the thing: we tend to think that life is something we go out and get, or earn, or buy, or win. But, it turns out that *real* life – like love – can’t be won or earned or bought, but only given away. The more we give it away, the more we have. Only when we love others, do we most understand what love really is. Only when we give away our life for the sake of others, do we discover *real* life ourselves. Somehow, in reaching out to fulfill the needs of others, our own deepest needs are met. Call this the mystery of life. Call this the key to the kingdom of God. Call this being *followers* of Jesus the Christ.

Like Peter, each of us has great difficulty grasping the totality of who Jesus is, and understanding what he requires of his disciples. It can be so easy to ask Jesus to meet our needs and fulfill our expectations, and yet so difficult to “follow the leader” when his way appears unpopular, uncomfortable, and uncompromising. No wonder our spiritual growth comes through an ongoing process made possible by constant openness to the work of the Holy Spirit, faithful devotion to the biblical word, regular nourishment at our Lord’s Table, honest confession of our self-centeredness that causes us to stray from the way of our Lord, and Christ-inspired confrontation with the deceptive, destructive, and deadly powers at work in our world.

The story is told that, at the height of the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa – when some Christians were literally suffering and dying for justice there – Archbishop Desmond Tutu would gather with his staff for morning prayer. Often, as he was concluding their time together, he would ask, “If being Christian became a crime, would there be enough evidence to convict us?” With this question, he was keeping himself and his staff focused on who and whose they were as *followers* of Jesus the Christ in insisting that God’s reconciling love transcends anything that tried to resist it in their struggle for dignity and freedom.

To “follow the leader” – to follow our risen Lord – is to lose ourselves in the abundance of grace that we receive, the love that we share, and the ministries that we fulfill. Self-denial and cross-bearing are not

about being less happy, but about discovering real and abundant life – a kind of life our culture can hardly imagine – that comes in and through sacrificial love in service to one another. May our Lord's life-giving and life-saving words come alive in us for the sake of the world. Amen

Hymn of the Day

Oh, Praise the Gracious Power

(tune: *Marion*)

- 1 Oh, praise the gracious pow'r
that tumbles walls of fear
and gathers in one house of faith
all strangers far and near:

Refrain

We praise you, Christ!
Your cross has made us one!

- 2 Oh, praise persistent truth
that opens fist'd minds
and eases from their anxious clutch
the prejudice that blinds: *Refrain*
- 3 Oh, praise inclusive love,
encircling ev'ry race,
oblivious to gender, wealth,
to social rank or place: *Refrain*
- 4 Oh, praise the word of faith
that claims us as God's own,
a living temple built on Christ,
our rock and cornerstone: *Refrain*
- 5 Oh, praise the tide of grace
that laps at ev'ry shore
with visions of a world at peace,
no longer bled by war: *Refrain*
- 6 Oh, praise the pow'r, the truth,
the love, the word, the tide.
Yet more than these, oh, praise their source,
praise Christ the crucified: *Refrain*
- 7 Oh, praise the living Christ
with faith's bright songful voice!
Announce the gospel to the world
and with these words rejoice: *Refrain*

Text: Thomas H. Troeger, b. 1945

Text from *New Hymns for the Lectionary* © 1984 Oxford University Press, Inc.

The Prayers

Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus, and for all people according to their needs.

Revealing God, you have made yourself known through water and word, bread and wine. Continue to nurture your Church, that it is a place where your presence is experienced and shared.

Creating God, you brought life into being and called it good. Bring new creation to lands devastated by tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, fires, and other disasters. Help us restore forests and curb overflowing waters.

Protecting God, you desire all people to live in peace and safety. Help us provide for those who are in danger. Strengthen first responders to help meet the complex needs of others. Provide care and compassion as they face trauma themselves.

Transforming God, you announce release to the captives and freedom to the oppressed. Work through us to break chains of discrimination and injustice. Amplify voices that go unheard and inspire us to advocate for the those who are overlooked.

Forming God, you gather this congregation together around Word and Sacrament. Shape our communal life, that in our prayer, praise, and worship, we honor you and encourage one another. Increase our joy in working together.

Redeeming God, you accompany your people through every stage of life. We give you thanks for the saints who now rest in your embrace.

Into your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

WE WORSHIP WITH OUR OFFERINGS

The needs of Holy Trinity's mission and ministry are ongoing.

May we be faithful and generous as we support our mission
"to care actively in the name of Jesus Christ."

Offerings may be mailed to the church or dropped off at the church office.

You may also use the online giving portal on our website.

Go to www.holytrinitylynchburg.org and click on "Give."

You may also download the "GivePlus Church" app for your smart phone from Apple or Google.

Offertory Prayer

Merciful Father, we offer with joy and thanksgiving what you have first given us – our selves, our time, and our possessions, signs of your gracious love. Receive them for the sake of him who offered himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Lord's Prayer

*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen*

Blessing

Almighty God, Father, ✙ Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever. Amen

Dismissal

*Our service now begins. Go in peace. Serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.*

Postlude

Praeludium in B-Flat Major

Dieterich Buxtehude



The altar flowers are given to the glory of God
by Sally and Jeff Schneider
in memory of Sally's sister, Mary K. Schneider.



The candles are given to the glory of God by Judy Schulz
in memory of Steve;
and, with thanks to Dennis and the members of Holy Trinity
who have reached out to their family.

THIS WEEK AT HOLY TRINITY

Sunday, September 12	8:30 a.m.	Worship Service (via YouTube)
		Service of Holy Communion
	9:30 a.m.	Sunday Church School (for adults)
	10:30 a.m.	Service of Holy Communion
	2:00 p.m.	Pastor's Information Class
	4:30 p.m.	Holy Trinity Youth
	6:00 p.m.	Confirmation Class (grades six - nine)
Monday, September 13	9:15 a.m.	Strength & Balance Exercise Class
	9:50 a.m.	Chair Yoga Class
	7:00 p.m.	Bible Study - <i>Dreams That Shaped the Church and Other Fascinating Things About Dreams</i> (via Zoom)
Tuesday, September 14	7:00 p.m.	Church Council
Wednesday, September 15	12:10 p.m.	Service of Holy Communion
Friday, September 17	9:15 a.m.	Strength & Balance Exercise Class
	9:50 a.m.	Chair Yoga Class
	11:00 a.m.	Book Discussion Group - <i>The Making of Biblical Womanhood</i>
	6:00 p.m.	Dinner for Residents of The Gateway
Sunday, September 19		Worship Service (via YouTube)
	8:30 a.m.	Service of Holy Communion
	9:30 a.m.	Sunday Church School (for adults)
	10:30 a.m.	Service of Holy Communion
	5:00 p.m.	Holy Trinity Youth
	5:00 p.m.	Thomas Mass
	6:00 p.m.	Third Sunday Program

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Our Mission: "To care actively in the name of Jesus Christ."

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
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Pastor: Dennis S. Roberts

Organist-Choirmaster: J. William Greene

Director of Youth and Campus Ministries:

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