

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

OLD TESTAMENT – Jeremiah 15:15-21

Jeremiah's Complaint

15 O LORD, you know; remember me and visit me, and take vengeance for me on my persecutors. In your forbearance take me not away; know that for your sake I bear reproach. 16 Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts. 17 I did not sit in the company of revelers, nor did I rejoice; I sat alone, because your hand was upon me, for you had filled me with indignation. 18 Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Will you be to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail? 19 Therefore thus says the LORD: “If you return, I will restore you, and you shall stand before me. If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall be as my mouth. They shall turn to you, but you shall not turn to them. 20 And I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you to save you and deliver you, declares the LORD. 21 I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless.”

15:15-21 God has sent drought on Judah for her iniquities (Jer 14:1–6), and Jeremiah the prophet has attempted to intercede for them (14:7–9, 13, 19–22). But God refused to relent and commanded Jeremiah not to pray for the people (14:10–11, 14–18; 15:1–9). Jeremiah, in dark despair at God’s refusal, lamented his birth and the contempt that the whole land has for him (15:10). God’s reply was to repeat his judgment on Judah (15:11–14). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

15:15 *You know.* The Lord is aware of what Jeremiah has suffered (see v. 10). (CSB)

“You” is emphatic: “You yourself know.” The verb is repeated in the imperative at the end of the verse, *da’*. Jeremiah has accepted God’s judgment and now prays to God to remember and visit him and to do as he has said to those who reject him as prophet. “In your forbearance,” that is, “for slowness of anger” (*’al-le’erek ’apka*) toward those who despise God’s Word, “take me not away.” “Know that for your sake I bear reproach.” Jeremiah endures the reproach of Christ as a preacher of the Word of God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

remember. Express concern for. (CSB)

This is not Jeremiah “venting,” but taking his case to his Lord. Jeremiah implores God’s active intervention with “remember” which implies action as well as remembrance and care. This combination appears also in 14:10b and Ps 106:4. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 3)

your forbearance – Do not take me away. Another view is this understanding: “Do not, in the postponement of your anger, take me away.” The prophet complains that God is being too patient with his opponents. If God waits any longer, Jeremiah might perish. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 3)

15:16 *your words ... I ate them.* I digested them, I assimilated them, I made them a part of me (see Eze 2:8–3:3; Rev 10:9–10). (CSB)

As food is assimilated by the body, so God’s words permeated Jeremiah’s innermost being, bringing him joy and delight. (TLSB)

Jeremiah protests his innocence by referring to his call, when God put his Word in the prophet's mouth (1:9). Jeremiah was delighted to receive such a gift (compare Ezek 2:8-3:3 and see Deut 8:3; Is 55:1-11) (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 3)

Jeremiah's confession here is also true for every Christian. God's words were found not by Jeremiah but by God's initiative. God put his words in Jeremiah's mouth (1:9). Although Jeremiah struggled to accept the words God gave him to speak (1:1-9), he has eaten and inwardly digested them. God's words are joy and delight to his heart, in particular because Jeremiah is called by God's name. The Gospel brings joy to those who hear with faith. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

delight of my heart. See Ps 1:2. (CSB)

I am called by your name. I belong to you. (CSB)

15:17 *company of revelers* – The reference could be to carousers in general, in which case Jeremiah is stating that he has been about God's work, not his own pleasure. Or the reference could be to Jeremiah's prophetic opponents, those who were saying that repentance was not necessary and destruction was not coming (5:12; 7:4; 8:11). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 3)

Jeremiah has not joined the counsel of revelers. His prophetic ministry has often been characterized by God's warnings and threats and is a lonely calling. His prophecies have not come by his own choice (2 Pet 1:21), but because God's hand was on him. The words of God's indignation have filled Jeremiah with indignation also. The prophetic office has proven heavy to bear. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

li sat alone. Jeremiah never married (see 16:1), and he attracted only a few friends. (CSB)

your hand. Divine constraint (see 2Ki 3:15; Isa 8:11 and note; Eze 1:3; 3:14, 22; 37:1; 40:1). (CSB)

Jeremiah's message was not of his own concoction but was impelled by divine commission and authority. Cf Is 8:11; Ezk 3:14; 8:1. (TLSB)

indignation. At the sins of Judah (see 6:11). (CSB)

15:18 Two rhetorical questions used by Jeremiah to express his nagging doubts about himself, his mission and God's faithfulness. (CSB)

God does not answer the questions. His children "walk by faith, not by sight" (2Co 5:7). (TLSB)

The burden and suffering that belong to the preacher of the Gospel now come on Jeremiah (see 2 Cor 11:23-12:10). He shares in the sufferings of Christ (Col 1:24) and thereby exhibits Christ to the world in his own body. His "pain" (*ke'evi*) denotes extreme suffering that is unrelenting and perpetual (*netsach*), a wound from God's blow that will not heal. In his suffering, he cries out against God, because it appears that God has not kept his word (cf. Ps 22:1). His accusation is emphatic: "You will surely be (*hayo thihyeh*) to me a deceiver." He compares God to a waterway that fails when needed most. But God does not answer his question and challenge directly. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

why – What Christian has not asked this question with Jeremiah? We often assume that when God calls us to do his work, all will go smoothly. Jeremiah may have assumed that since he was a prophet of the Lord, the people would listen; and if the people did not listen, then certainly the Lord would promptly punish them. Since neither has happened (yet), Jeremiah is severely wounded and finds no healing. So

Jeremiah questions God's integrity. The construction of infinitive and indicative emphasizes the intensity of the prophet's thoughts. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 3)

pain unceasing... wound incurable. Jerusalem is similarly described in 30:12–15, together with God's promise of healing in 30:17. (CSB)

Will you be to me ... ? See Ps 22:1; Mt 27:46. (CSB)

deceitful brook.† See Mic 1:14, where also “deceptive” probably refers to the kind of intermittent streams described in Job 6:15–20. Tired and disillusioned like Elijah (1Ki 19:4), Jeremiah here accuses God of being undependable, in contrast to the Lord's own earlier description of himself as a “spring of living water.” (CSB)

Jeremiah is tempted to think that “the fountain of living waters” (2:13; 17:13) has become as “treacherous as a torrent-bed” (Jb 6:15), which quickly runs dry. (TLSB)

A watercourse that rushes with water when it rains, but dries up soon thereafter. Is the Lord one who gives water in the rainy season, then withholds it when it is needed most? Is he a failed spring, one who promises life but does not follow through? So it seems to Jeremiah, and often to us and our hearers. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 3)

15:19–21 The Lord commands Jeremiah to repent, then encourages him and renews his call. (CSB)

God does not fail to come to the rescue of His blustering spokesman. Without explaining the mystery of divine providence, the Lord beckons Jeremiah to return from the wasteland of doubt to an implicit trust in Him and in the promises He made to the prophet when He called him. It will not be a life of ease, for evil men will continue to fight against him. Yet the Lord will save and deliver him. (TLSB)

15:19 *therefore* - “Therefore,” *laken*. In answer to Jeremiah's complaint, God calls him to repentance and gives him instruction. The first of two conditions, introduced by *'im*, has two imperfect verbs in the protasis, indicating possible or probable fulfillment. “If you turn and I turn you, you shall stand before me.” Later the Lord hears Ephraim's lament, “Turn me and I shall be turned” (31:18). The apodosis contains the promise “You shall stand before me.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

return ... restore ... turn ... turn. The Hebrew root is the same for all four words. (CSB)

The response to the prophet is the same message Jeremiah is to speak to Judah: Repent. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 3)

if you utter what is precious– If you will now speak worthy things instead of the rubbish you have just spoken about me, then you will be my voice. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 3)

In the second condition, also with imperfect verbs, God addresses Jeremiah's prophetic office: “If you bring out (*totsi*) the precious instead of the worthless, as my mouth (*kephi*) you shall be.” God commands Jeremiah to be like the householder at the end of Jesus' parables (Mt 13:52), speaking the precious treasures of God's Word, not the “philosophy and empty deceit” (Col 2:8) and “cleverly devised myths” (2 Pet 1:16) of the world, nor the “different doctrine” of false teachers in the Church (1 Tim 1:3). The apodosis gives the promise that Jeremiah will be God's mouth to Judah (cf. Ex 4:16; Lk 10:16). Jeremiah speaks in God's stead and by his command. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

you shall be as my mouth. Lit. “mouth.” (CSB)

He is to continue but this time with confidence in God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 3)

they shall turn to you – Pointed rebuke, not total rejection, is God’s way of dealing with his people, calling them back into a right relationship. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 3)

God instructs Jeremiah that as he speaks with God’s authority, he must not yield to the pressures to join the ways of wayward Judah. Instead, Judah must turn to Jeremiah, for true repentance is a return to God’s Word. Like Jeremiah in the first condition of this verse, they, too, must be turned by God in repentance. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

15:20 *make you...a fortified wall* – The vocabulary is similar to Jeremiah’s call (1:18-19), so that God is affirming Jeremiah in his position. Therefore the verse is akin to Jesus affirming Peter three times after the resurrection. God promises to be with Jeremiah, to save him and to deliver him. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 3)

God repeats the promise he made to Jeremiah in 1:18–19. The prophet is an impregnable, fortified city against the opponents of God’s Word. The promise given to every prophet and preacher is repeated, “For I am with you” (*ki-’itka ’ani*; cf. Ex 3:12; Mt 28:20). God promises to save (*lehoshi’aka*) and deliver (*ulehatsileka*) Jeremiah. The promise is established by divine declaration (*ne’um-yehwah*). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

15:21 *deliver you out...the wicked*. While the hand of the Lord seemed to be the cause of Jeremiah’s incurable wounds (V. 17), it is now God who will deliver Jeremiah from the “hand of the wicked.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 3)

redeem you – Means to ransom, to buy back. God ransoms or redeems Israel from Egypt (Deut 7:8), from exile (Jer 31:11), and from iniquity (Ps. 130:8), acting on the basis of his unfailing love (Ps 130:7). God responds to Jeremiah’s “why” with an overwhelming proclamation of his gracious, saving acts that will prevail ultimately, regardless of the current situation. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 3)

God repeats this promise with the same verb, *wehitsaltika*, “I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked.” The second line repeats in parallelism, “and redeem you (*uphedhithika*) from the grasp of the ruthless.” God’s spokesman need not fear Christ’s enemies, because he has God’s promise of deliverance and redemption in Christ (Mt 10:22, 26). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

15:10–21 Jeremiah complains that everyone stands against him because of his negative message. He comes close to accusing God of deceiving him into thinking that his job as prophet was going to be easier than it has been. God calls Jeremiah to repentance for his doubt and promises to strengthen him for the work ahead. We, too, are often weak and afraid to proclaim God’s Word boldly, fearing the reprisals we might suffer. God’s grace is sufficient for our weakness, and His Holy Spirit empowers us to share His Word faithfully. • Grant us repentance and courage, Lord, and strengthen us to do Your work in joy and confidence, through Jesus Christ. Amen. (TLSB)

EPISTLE – Romans 12:9-21

Marks of the True Christian

9 Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. 10 Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. 11 Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. 17 Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” 20 To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

12:9–21 Illustrations of genuine love (cf 1Co 13:4–8). (TLSB)

12:9 *Love.* The Christian’s love for fellow Christians and perhaps also for his fellowman. (CSB)

genuine. True love, not pretense. In view of the preceding paragraph, with its emphasis on social concern, the love Paul speaks of here is not mere emotion but is active love. (CSB)

Lit, “without hypocrisy.” This love is not concerned with whether it receives anything in return. (TLSB)

The mark of genuine love is therefore an abhorrence of evil coupled with a holding-fast to the good. (Franzmann)

Abhor. Despise and be repulsed. (TLSB)

12:10 *brotherly affection.* Love within the family of God. (CSB)

Those in Christ’s family should exhibit familial love toward one another. (TLSB)

Where there is genuine love, there the church as the family of God is a reality. There all the brothers of the firstborn Son love one another and care for one another. Both the words used here, “love” and “brotherly affection,” are taken from the vocabulary of warm, spontaneous family affection. (Franzmann)

outdo one another in showing honor. Only a mind renewed by the Holy Spirit (see v. 2) could possibly do this (see Php 2:3). (CSB)

Implies to go out ahead first; do not wait to be loved first. (TLSB)

The ESV has “Outdo one another in showing honor.” Paul speaks these commands calmly and concisely, as if obedience to them were self-evident. It is self-evident, not only under the impetus and inspiration of the mercies of God. Here particularly the Christians are being summoned to nonconformity with their world. The Greco-Roman culture which they breathed in as their native air put no premium on humility. And yet, “humility” is not the adequate word for what Paul is saying here, for the negative not of self-depreciation is not dominant in his common. The emphasis is on the positive, on seeing the man beside you with eyes of the eyes of the God of all mercies, as a man of infinite worth, the man for whom Christ died, worth your love and honor, not because he is such and such a man but because he is there placed there by God. (Franzmann)

12:11 *fervent in spirit.* † Lit. “fervent in spirit.” If “spirit” means “Holy Spirit” here, the reference would be to the fervor the Holy Spirit provides. (CSB)

Lit, “boiling over with the Spirit,” who fills our lives and flows out from us to others. (TLSB)

Such love cannot remain a sentiment; it becomes an action, to be carried out with a zeal that never flags. This must be “love of the Spirit” (15:30). The Spirit is the source and power of this love; the energies of our humane goodwill will do not suffice for it. It is a service rendered, through the other man, to the Lord Himself. (Cf. Matthew 25:40) (Franzmann)

12:12 *rejoice in hope.* The certainty of the Christian’s hope is a cause for joy (see 5:5; see also 8:16–25; 1Pe 1:3–9). (CSB)

Love and hope belong together. Paul more than once expressly connects the two (1 Cor 13:7; Col. 1:4-5; cf. Phil 4:5; Romans 13:10-11). The command to “rejoice in hope” seems to come in rather abruptly; perhaps Paul’s first readers, whose life was lived in constant hope, did not find the transition so abrupt as we do. The joy which they drew from their hope helped them to bear the burden of the never-ending claim upon their love and made their service to the Lord the taking of the kindly yoke. They drew strength from their hope to bear up bravely under tribulation. They prayed continuously, “Our Lord, come!” (1 Cor 16:22; cf. Rev 22:20), and bore up under the pressure of the present until their Lord should come. (Franzmann)

patient. † Enduring triumphantly—necessary for a Christian, because affliction is his frequent experience (see Jn 16:33). (CSB)

faithful in prayer. One must not only pray in hard times, but also maintain communion with God through prayer at all times (see Lk 18:1; 1Th 5:17). (CSB)

12:13 *contribute to the needs of the saints.* The Christian has social responsibility to all people, but especially to other believers (see Gal 6:10). (CSB)
Not only does the Christian hope give courage and stamina in enduring afflictions; it also gives the Christian that largeness of heart which makes him sympathetic towards the needs of his fellow saints. (Franzmann)

Share with others in need. (TLSB)

show hospitality – This would be a special form of this active sympathetic helpfulness, for hospitality is thought of here not as a general social graciousness but as a form of aid to be supplied to travelers, especially to exiled or persecuted fellow Christians. (Franzmann)

Lit, “love of strangers.” In the Dispersion, Jews likely had the custom of welcoming fellow Jewish travelers into their homes. Paul would be encouraging the continuation of this custom. (TLSB)

12:14 *Bless those who persecute you.* Paul is echoing Jesus’ teaching in Mt 5:44; Lk 6:28. (CSB)

Speak well of and pray to God on their behalf; follow Jesus’ example (Mt 5:44; Lk 23:34). (TLSB)

If hope gives largeness of heart toward the persecuted, it also creates the capacity to love and bless one’s persecutors. Our Lord’s command to love and bless one’s enemies and persecutors (Matt 5:44) was not a blank, detached ethical imperative; it has its setting in the hope created by His proclamation of the Kingdom drawn near (Matt 4:17) and in the promises of the Beatitudes (Matt 5:3-12). Paul is recalling

this command of Jesus here. Peter likewise gives the command to refrain from vengeance and to bless those who revile in a setting of hope (1 Peter 3:9). (Franzmann)

12:15 See Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:4). Though Paul was not one of Jesus' original 12 disciples, he was well informed about the content of Jesus' teaching and the historical content of the Gospel writers. Cf 1Co 15:3–8 for Paul's summary of the Gospel. (TLSB)

Identification with others in their joys and in their sorrows is a Christian's privilege and responsibility. (CSB)

The largeness of the heart created by the Christian hope makes a man open for the joys and sorrows of others generally. Since "the appointed time has grown "very short" (1 Cor 7:29) and the "form of this world is passing away" (1 Cor 7:31), a man's own joys and sorrows in this age cease to be of ultimate significance. He has a loose hold on the blessings of this age (1 Cor 7:30). He can enter into the joys and sorrows of his fellowman with ready sympathy because he is not shut up in his own concerns. He becomes like his Lord, who manifested His glory in this passing age both by supplying wedding wine at Cana (John 2:1-11) and by weeping at the grave of Lazarus (John 11:35) (Franzmann)

12:16 Paul again warns against regarding oneself too highly (v 3; cf Lk 14:11). (TLSB)

LIVE IN HARMONY...NOT BE CONCEITED – An admonition to unanimity, humility, and gracious condescension, and a warning against pride are not out of place where present tribulation and the hope that rises above tribulation are being spoken of; Paul's words to the suffering church at Philippi witness to that (Phil 1:29-2:4; cf. 2:14-18; 4:2). Common tribulation and the prospect of a common martyrdom do not of themselves insure unanimity and humility in the troubled church. The church's strength is in her hope; Paul gives the motive and dynamic for this serene forbearance in the words: "The Lord is at hand." (Phil 4:5b) (Franzmann)

Have the same attitude toward one another (cf Php 2:2). (TLSB)

12:17 *repay no one evil for evil.* See Mt 5:39–42, 44–45; 1Th 5:15; 1Pe 3:9. (CSB)

Be honorable in sight of all. A possible reflection of Pr 3:4 in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT). Christian conduct should never betray the high moral standards of the gospel, or it will provoke the disdain of unbelievers and bring the gospel into disrepute (see 2Co 8:21; 1Ti 3:7). (CSB)

Preoccupy yourself with doing excellent things before all people that they may also glorify God (Mt 5:16). (TLSB)

If haughtiness and conceit are overcome, the desire for vengeance is cut off at the root. Paul is to speak against taking vengeance again, from another point of view, in v. 19. Here he is concerned about the witness given to the world by Christians in their suffering. If Christians present their bodies to God as a living sacrifice, they will present to the world meekly suffering bodies, a noble witness in whom they hope. (Franzmann)

12:18 *If it is possible ... live peaceably.* Jesus pronounced a blessing on peacemakers (Mt 5:9), and believers are to cultivate peace with everyone to the extent that it depends on them. (CSB)

Now the focus extends beyond the believing community. Peace may not always be possible, but believers should never intentionally cause hostility. (TLSB)

Their witness will be not only passive but active also. Mindful of their Lord's beatitude upon peacemakers, they will turn the other cheek, give the cloak to him who sues for the coat, and go the second mile (Matt 5:39-41). They will have peace with all men – "if possible"; they cannot purchase peace at the price of denying their Lord or by obeying men rather than God. (Franzmann)

12:19 *never avenge yourselves* – A Christian repaying evil for evil is a sorry witness to the world; he is also denying his God, the God of hope. The wrath of God will judge God's enemies at the end of days, after God's mercies have had full scope to do their work. (Franzmann)

Christians do not take vengeance into their own hands, but leave it to God, the highest authority. See note, 13:1. "Private remedy is prohibited not by advice, but by a command (Matthew 5:39; Romans 12:19). Public remedy, made through the office of the public official, is not condemned, but is commanded and is God's work, according to Paul (Romans 13). Now the different kinds of public remedy are legal decisions, capital punishment, wars, and military service. Clearly, many writers have thought wrongly about these matters. They were in the error that the Gospel is an outward, new, and monastic form of government. Also, they did not see that the Gospel brings eternal righteousness to hearts, while it outwardly approves the public state" (Ap XVI 59–60). *Vengeance is Mine*. Sung by Moses just before Israel conquered the Promised Land. God's wrath will ultimately avenge (2:5, 8). Cf 13:1–5 for one way God carries out His vengeance now. (TLSB)

12:20–21 In Ps 140:10, this image is a sign of harsh judgment. But Paul's quote from Pr 25:21–22 points toward driving the enemy to repentance (cf v 14). (TLSB)

12:20 *heap burning coals on his head*. Doing good to one's enemy (v. 21), instead of trying to take revenge, may bring about his repentance (see note on Pr 25:22). (CSB)

The only "vengeance" which the Christian has at his disposal is the vengeance of unsought and unmerited love, love shown to his enemy. The only pangs which the Christian can bring upon his enemy at the salutary pangs of contrition; these are the "fiery coals" heaped on his enemy's head. Paul uses the picturesque language of Prov 25:21-22 to express this thought. The origin of the metaphor of heaping fiery coals on someone's head is obscure, but the interpretation given above seems probable and is confirmed by the following verse. (Franzmann)

12:21 *overcome evil with good* – If the Christian allows his natural impulse to carry him away and responds to evil with evil, that is a defeat for him (cf. 1 Cor 6:7); he is overcome by evil. The flesh has triumphed over the Spirit, and the renewed mind has again become a "base mind" (1:28). If he is led by the Spirit and requites evil with good, that is a victory for him; the victory of Christ, who loved His enemies and interceded and died for them, is being realized in his life. He is overcoming evil as Christ overcame it, in meekness and suffering. His love for his enemy proclaims the Christ to his enemy, confronts his enemy with the invincible love of Christ, and leads his enemy through shame and penitence to faith. This is, of course, the very opposite of the heroic ideal of man. The Christian is not "a man's man," but God's man, with a hope given him by the God of hope who raised Jesus from the dead and gave man a victory over sin and death which quenches in him the desire for any other victories. This thought of victory, or overcoming, is closely associated with the resurrection in Paul (1 Cor 15:55-57) and in the NT with the hope that does not put to shame generally, particularly in Revelation. (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 12:11; 15:2; 21:7) (Franzmann)

12:9–21 Here is what a life of genuine love (v 9) looks like in specific detail. It is a life that follows Christ's example (Php 2:1–11) and models His words from the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5–7). We all fail to live up to this standard. However, as living sacrifices, we have been transformed to live according to God's loving will (vv 1–2). This serves as a powerful witness to others (cf Mt 5:16; Jn 13:34–35). God

in Christ has first loved us in this way and, by His mercies (v 1), our salvation is secure and not dependent on how we love. • Father, thank You for loving me first and forever by sending Your Son and making me a part of His Body. Train my heart in hope and my hand in mercy in harmony with Jesus' words and deeds. Amen. (TLSB)

GOSPEL – Matthew 16:21-28

Jesus Predicts His Death

21 From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. 22 And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” 23 But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

16:21 *from that time on* – Jesus now set His eyes on Jerusalem, where He must suffer, die, and on the third day be raised in order to fulfill His Father's will (first Passion prediction recorded in Mt). (TLSB)

The pace and direction of the conversation now becomes more focused and rapid. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 3)

It will take some time for the disciples to realize what Jesus is saying. They will not, in fact, be able to grasp it until after the plan is carried out. (CC)

began. The beginning of a new emphasis in Jesus' ministry. Instead of teaching the crowds in parables, he concentrated on preparing the disciples for his coming suffering and death. (CSB)

from the elders...chief priests – These are spiritual leaders, the very people who should be leading the people to the Messiah. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 3)

Jesus' ministry has evoked many reactions, including the hatred and opposition of influential people in Israel. Arrayed against Him are the like of Herod Antipas (14:1-2), Galilean Pharisees (12:2, 14, 24), Jerusalem Pharisees and scribes (15:1), and Sadducees as well (16:1) Always before, when the opposition had arisen, Jesus had chosen to withdraw and defer the moment of final conflict. Now, however, He declares that He must provoke and confront His enemies in Jerusalem, that is, the city where God's Christ, the Messiah of Israel, should rightly be received with faith and acclaimed with joy, but where He must die. (CC)

be killed – This grabbed the attention of the disciples, who caught their collective breath, looking at each other in disbelief. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 3)

third day be raise – The disciples were still thinking about had just been said. “Must be killed” was still going through their minds, not hearing the “third day be raised to life.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 3)

Death will not be the end, however. Jesus will be raised to eternal life on the third day. Judging by Peter's response, the disciples are not able to get past the words about Jesus' suffering and death. Their categories simply do not allow for such a thing, and so they give no evidence here (nor in reaction to the

two later passion predictions, 17:22-23 and 20:17-19 that they even have heard what Jesus said about being raised from the dead. (CC)

It will take some time for the disciples to realize what Jesus is saying. They will not, in fact, be able to grasp it until after the plan is carried out. (CC)

16:22 *never happen* – Peter’s harsh rebuke resulted from his failure to envision a Christ who must suffer and die. Such a Messiah was not part of Jewish thinking at that time. (TLSB)

This is from the lips of the same man who made the confession “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” perhaps just moments ago. Jesus told Peter at that time that this confession was revealed to him by the Father. But now this phrase is revealed by Satan. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 3)

Yes, Peter believes that Jesus is the Anointed One, the man who is uniquely God’s Son. If such a one is to go to Jerusalem, however, then surely he should go up in triumph to be received as Messiah. To be sure, Peter cannot be unaware of the opposition to Jesus on the part of the “blind guides” (15:14) and those whose teaching is a harmful “leaven” (16:6, 11-12). In the face of that opposition, however, will not God be “merciful” to Jesus in Jerusalem? After all, God’s dwelling place – the Jerusalem temple with the altar for sacrificial atonement for sin – is the place where, more than any other in the world the mercy of God is to be found. (CC)

Peter’s extravagantly mistaken response to Jesus gives telling evidence of something key, both historically and theologically. The Jewish messianic expectation is in Israel at the time, it seems to have no room for a suffering and dying Messiah. (CC)

To be sure, Peter likely does not consciously realize the full implications of what he is saying to Jesus. Jesus realizes it, however, and His rejoinder to Peter’s response is savage and unyielding. In the wilderness temptation of 4:1-11, Satan had tried to lure Jesus into a path of power, toward the goal of seizing glory away from lowliness and obedience. (CC)

16:23 *get behind me Satan* – Peter, who so beautifully made the confession of faith, was now being used by Satan to encourage Jesus to turn his face from Jerusalem and from doing “the things of God” that must be done. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 3)

Jesus addressed Peter as Satan’s spokesman because his counsel would keep Jesus from fulfilling God’s purposes. (TLSB)

Satan. A loanword from Hebrew, meaning “adversary” or “accuser.” (CSB)

hindrance. Gk *skandalon*. Peter, whose name means rock (v 18), had become Peter the stumbling block. (TLSB)

things of God ... things of man. Peter’s thoughts were governed by human values rather than divine values. He did not yet understand the theology of the cross. (TLSB)

16:21–23 Peter genuinely thinks he is helping Jesus when he tries to talk Him out of suffering and death. At times, we also fail to understand God’s ways, thinking we know better. Jesus knows that He has to take up the cross for our salvation. Peter will learn that truth later, a truth that continues to give us comfort and peace. • Lord, thank You for being willing to suffer and die that I might be forgiven. Lead me to speak Your Word aright. Amen. (TLSB)

Take Up Your Cross and Follow Jesus

24 Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. 26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? 27 For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. 28 Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

16:24 *if anyone would come after me* – Jesus now turns to the disciples, the people gathered around him asks them what they want to do now that they know who he is and what he has to do. If that is the case, they must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow him. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 3)

deny himself – There probably is no limit to the specific application of what it means to deny oneself as Jesus here teaches and commands. There are so many sinful desires in our hearts! The context here in Matthew 16, however, emphasizes two related tendencies that are alive and well in every fallen human creature who, by God’s gracious invitation, wants to be Jesus’ disciple. (CC)

Origen, Commentary on Matthew, 12:24, says, “on this account let every thought and every purpose and every word and every action become a denial of ourselves, but a testimony about Christ and in Christ. (CC)

The first tendency is to think – and insist – that God’s way of dealing with the world and its evil, should conform to our way, that is, a way of power and success. If evil really is evil, should not the God of Israel, the Creator of all things, simply come forth in might and overcome it? Moreover, shouldn’t Jesus’ disciples be allowed to be participants in such work, separating wheat from chaff and uprooting the sons of the evil one (13:28)? God’s mysterious answer is, simply, no. (CC)

The second tendency, related to the first, is for the a disciple personally appropriate the insistence that God work in humanly powerful ways, so that the disciple desires to exercise power over others, especially over fellow disciples, so that he can accomplish what he believes should be done. Living in each disciple is the dark conviction that can destroy unity and do untold damage to the cause and name of Christ: “put me in charge, and I’ll set things aright.” Ambition, comparison, and criticism are all ways of embracing and exalting oneself, rather than denying oneself. (CC)

Instead, Jesus chose the way of service and obedience and suffering for the sake of Israel and the world. Now He calls every disciple – every Christian – to look at the darkness within, at the desire for power over others, and to deny that desire whenever and wherever it shows itself. If any of us wants to come after Him, let us deny ourselves. (CC)

To affirm that the self has no claim or value worth comparing with Christ (Php 3:8–9). (TLSB)

take up his cross. Jesus led and taught by example. When Jesus called disciples, His usual invitation was “Follow Me” (4:19; 9:9). “Without faith, human nature cannot, in any way, do the works of the First or Second Commandment [1 Corinthians 2:14]. Without faith, human nature does not call upon God, nor expect anything from Him, nor bear the cross” (AC XX 36–37). (TLSB)

Again, the applications are many and varied. It seems likely that this second imperative would follow from the first, almost as the inevitable consequence. In the most general terms, then, the daily struggle with sin and self-denial is a form of taking up the cross. More specifically, however, as Jesus’ disciples

live their lives and speak in His name, they will come up against the trouble and evil in this world. By eschewing the way of power in these situations, Jesus' disciples will open themselves to various kinds of attack and shame and harm, depending on the context. (CC)

The cross that any given disciple may carry – that is, the suffering that he or she experiences for the sake of Christ – will vary. The point here is not to attempt to determine in advance the kind of difficulty or suffering or even martyrdom that the life of discipleship may bring. (CC) (Marshfield Youth Chancel Drama)

One often hears Christians apply the phrase “carrying the cross” to all manner of sufferings and hardship in this life. Jesus' saying here does not refer to the general difficulties of life such as illness, unexplained tragedies, the destructive convulsion of the creation (natural disasters), and so forth. He is referring to suffering that comes to disciples because they are disciples of the Christ. (CC)

In Galilee during Jesus' ministry and in the days in which Matthew would likely have been writing his Gospel, disciples would have been opposed by others chiefly because of their devotion to Christ as Lord and Savior. In Jewish contests, the worship of Jesus would have been offensive and cause hatred and rejection. When the Greco-Roman world was encroaching on the lives of the disciples, it would have been the exclusive allegiance to Jesus (and the renunciation of other gods and the Roman civil cult) that gave rise to cross-bearing. (CC)

Many Christians in the world today are quite clearly and painfully confronted with the reality of cross-bearing in their lives as disciples. In North America and especially the United States, the situation has been different, although it is changing. Christianity has been the dominant religion in Western society, and that fact has, until recently, minimized the imposition of the cross in civil realm. Obviously, there are many personal situations in which believers experience difficult times because they follow Jesus. On a larger scale, however, the exclusive claims of Jesus very well could give rise to increasing times and circumstance for cross-bearing. When “truth” is democratized and relativized, then the absolute divine truth of Jesus, which society deems to be intolerance, alone is intolerable. The exclusive call of Jesus' disciples to “follow me” is increasingly offensive to religious pluralism. (CC) (See article on “A Faith Debate: Is Bin Laden in Hell? – USA Today – May 23, 2011 below.)

A faith debate: Is bin Laden in hell?

By Thomas S. Kidd

Because of the strange coincidence of two recent events — the killing of Osama bin Laden, and the publication of [Rob Bell's Love Wins](#), a book which advocates the principle of universal salvation for all people — Americans of faith are taking a fresh look at hell and eternal damnation. Who is hell-bound, after all, and who is likely to escape this final fiery plunge?

The book has caused an uproar among evangelical Christians, for whom the doctrine of hell has long been a theological certainty. Upon learning of the book, leading evangelical pastor [John Piper](#) succinctly tweeted "[Farewell, Rob Bell](#)," reflecting the conviction among many conservative believers that Bell's views are beyond the pale.

‘OBL, you’re in hell!’

Notions about hell also framed many Americans' reaction to the killing of bin Laden. Well *of course* this despicable fiend would be destined to hell! The widespread approval of the al-Qaeda leader's termination quickly spun off into questions about where his departed soul resides (assuming there is an afterlife — for those who don't believe in one, the whole discussion may seem pointless, at best).

Crowds celebrating outside the White House reportedly chanted "OBL, you're in hell!" Fox News show host Mike Huckabee addressed the deceased terrorist directly, telling him, "Welcome to hell."

These anecdotes reflect a majority assumption, as a CNN survey showed that 61% of Americans believe that bin Laden is in hell. Pastor Bell apparently still represents the minority view.

But today's popular approaches to hell have, each in their way, actually discarded traditional Christian beliefs. Many like Bell believe that progress in ethical understanding requires modification of precepts such as hell. The Bible repeatedly refers to hell, and the idea of hell has a longstanding place in not only Christianity, but Islam and some traditions within Judaism. Still, Bell argues that a loving God would never cast people into everlasting perdition.

Then we have Huckabee and many others. The operative assumptions in this camp are that 1) righteous people can know for sure who goes to hell, and that 2) really bad people are especially deserving of divine judgment. But, though they are often espoused by Christians, these beliefs do not easily accord with traditional Christian faith, either.

Or are we all in danger?

The colonial-era pastor Jonathan Edwards, the most celebrated (or notorious, depending on your perspective) preacher on hell in American history, took a different approach. To Edwards, the reality of hell threatened all people, no matter how good they seemed in the world's eyes. God is perfectly holy, he said, and we have all fallen short of his standard, therefore all are subject to divine punishment.

All of us are, in Edwards' phrase, "sinners in the hands of an angry God." But in love and mercy, God made a way of salvation through Jesus and his death on the cross.

We'll never know for sure who will finally accept God's forgiveness, perhaps even in the last moments of life. Some notorious criminals would find God's grace, Edwards believed, while some hypocrites who had seemed to be saints would be turned away at heaven's gates.

Edwards spent his final years ministering to Native Americans, among the most reviled people in the colonies. But Edwards told them (amazingly, for his time) that their sins were no worse than English colonists'. We all need God's grace, he said. Edwards would undoubtedly caution us against putting our own righteousness before God above even that of a murderer like Osama bin Laden.

American believers, then, need both clarity and humility about hell. Denying the reality of hell might suit modern tastes, but it doesn't stand up to the overwhelming weight of the Christian scriptures and historic tradition. But confidently asserting that bin Laden is now in hell also treats this fearsome, mysterious reality with far less sobriety than it warrants.

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follow me – Here is the power and motivation for Jesus' disciples as the Lord shapes and remolds their thinking in ways that are strange and likely frightening. Jesus' call has, within itself, the power to create and sustain the faithful response it desires. His Word enables His disciples to follow Him wherever He goes. The Christ is going to the cross, on behalf of and in the place of all. The Son of the living God will be raised to resurrection life, the firstfruits and guarantee of the final day of victory for all in Him. (CC)

16:25 *save his life* – This is a paradox. Reject death of this world for a life everlasting. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 3)

The two ways are like oil and water, light and darkness, life and death. Jesus' disciples cannot calculate and plan ahead to preserve themselves. On the other hand and paradoxically, when one loses one's life – that is, trustingly relinquishes control and power and simply follow Jesus – then one finds life, indeed and forever. (CC)

16:26 *forfeits his soul* – It all slips through your fingers as they relax in death. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 3)

give in return – How many people have tried to buy their way, no longer remembering that it has been paid for on the cross of Christ with his precious blood? They are blinded by the falsehood of Satan. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 3)

The answer to these rhetorical questions is “nothing.” In both questions, Jesus referred to eternal life. (TLSB)

16:27 *come with His angels.* When Jesus returns to judge the living and the dead, His angels will accompany Him (13:40, 49; 25:31). (TLSB)

glory of His Father. Jesus' heavenly glory and divine nature will be clearly evident at the final judgment. (TLSB)

repay. Those who lose their life for Jesus' sake will receive public vindication on the Last Day (25:31–46). (TLSB)

what he has done – The preceding context (16:21-26) has been full of polar opposites: death and resurrection, God versus Satan, “the things of God” versus “the things of men,” and saving one's life versus losing it. In light of these black and white alternatives, with no gray area or middle ground in between them, it seems virtually certain the “work” of each person is either discipleship or apostasy. Either a person has taken up the cross or has not, has followed Christ in faith or believes in another, has attempted to save his own life or has lost it for the sake of Christ. This does not involve a sliding scale or a graded comparison. A person does one or the other, just as one either does the will of the Father or not. Jesus' words here should not be heard as a call to be “faithful enough” or “better” in one's life of discipleship. (CC)

16:28 There are two main interpretations of this verse: 1. It is a prediction of the transfiguration, which happened a week later (17:1) and which demonstrated that Jesus will return in his Father's glory (16:27). 2. It refers to the day of Pentecost and the rapid spread of the gospel described in the book of Acts. The context seems to favor the first view. See note on 2 Pe 1:16.

The first has to do with the meaning of the phrase “to taste death.” I can readily say that I am in full agreement with the standard view that this does not mean “to almost die” or “to come close to death,” but simply is an idiom for “to die.” Jesus' saying, then, declares that some of the people who are listening to Him as He utters these words will not physically die until they see something happen. (CC)

The second question concerns the force of the “until” clause, to wit, whether the clause implies that there will be a reversal of the main clause, which states that “some...will certainly not taste death,” that is, “some...will certainly not die.” In other words, after some see the Son of Man is coming with His reign, will those people, who are now standing here with Jesus, then dies sometime? As I note in the discussion of 1:25 and 10:23, “until” clauses are grammatically ambiguous, and the question is only able to be answered after the third and most difficult questions receives attention. (CC)

Matthew 16:28 is a genuinely difficult saying, and confident conclusions about what Jesus is referring to may elude us. For my own part, I have argued elsewhere that certain Matthean connections suggest that, after finding a kind of partial or initial fulfillment in the transfiguration, we should look to the scene of Jesus' agony in Gethsemane as the paradoxical time of fulfillment when “the Son of Man is coming with His reign” (16:28). (CC)

One of the most obvious connections between the transfiguration and the Garden of Gethsemane is that Jesus “took along” the same three disciples, both to the mountain and into the garden. (CC)

This coming is not the same as the coming in glory to which Jesus referred in v 27. Jesus assured His little band of followers that some of them would see His kingdom come in His resurrection, Pentecost, and the growth of the Church (cf Col 1:6). The disciples were not to expect the end of the world until “this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world” (24:14). (TLSB)

16:24–28 Talk of suffering and death, taking up one’s cross, and losing one’s life sounds strange and foreboding to Jesus’ disciples. It does to us too. Yet the end is not the cross; the end is life in God’s kingdom. To live in His kingdom must be our ultimate purpose. Many of the first disciples saw the glorious unveiling of that Kingdom when Christ rose from the dead. Peter saw the fulfillment of the promise on Pentecost. We continue to behold the spread of the message of Christ’s cross into all the world. • Blessed Savior, give me the will and strength to take up the cross and follow You to life eternal. Amen. (TLSB)