

Matthew 16:13-21 13th Sunday after Pentecost Aug. 25, 1996

*13Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" 14And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." 15He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." 17And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. 18And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. 19I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." 20Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.*

Seventy-eight times - that is what the article said - seventy-eight times.

The police had been called to go to the apartment complex seventy-eight times.

That is not what I had hoped to read.

Maximum Independent Living (MIL) is requesting a zoning change so that apartments for people with disabilities can be built in Avon Lake. For a long time now Jan Purk has been talking about this, sharing her excitement about this. People with special needs will be provided for here in our own back yard; Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry is one of the organizations that created MIL in order to help people. You and I are part of this.

You met Mark Brauer earlier this summer; he's second in command at Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry. He's committed to helping people.

Maybe you remember Dick Sering who preached here some years ago, He is the head of Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry. I do not know two finer people.

But then I read about the experience in Mentor on the Lake at an apartment complex like the one proposed here - seventy-eight calls to the police. Do we really want this in our back yard? That is what people are asking.

I called Steve Hansler, executive director of MIL. He told me that most of the problem had been a man who has been evicted and that there have been no arrests or charges filed from all those calls. That relieved me some. But still I wish I could stand up here and say to you: "I know these people; everything will be perfect because they are involved."

But everything won't be perfect.

"You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it."

What a glorious moment, what a glorious promise.

Peter had just made the confession, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God” and on this confession Jesus would build his church.

How easy it would have been in that moment to have dreamed dreams: victory over evil - all disease and all greed and all that harms children and the poor. The gates of hell will not prevail. Those gates guarding the very stronghold of evil would be broken through and all whom evil would claim and imprison, set free. People with disabilities, and sinners, people without hope, set free.

“You are Peter and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”

Easy to dream, but not so easy to live. Even Peter fell under the power of the enemy for a moment, he swore he never knew Jesus when Jesus was arrested and on trial. Even Jesus was put in the hands of the enemy, into the hands of death before the Father came crashing through the gates of death to save him.

But even in those darkest moments Jesus word remained, the gates of Hades shall not prevail against the church, the people who live under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. But it will never be easy.

I think of the language of the second lesson: “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Sacrifice. That is the word that describes your life in Christ. Sacrifice speaks of the cost of following Christ, breaking down those gates of Hades. The world wants good to be easy, without cost. We'll let them live nearby as long as there is no cost to us, no inconvenience, no problems.

But we follow a Lord who counted the cost of breaking down the gates of Hades to rescue us. We follow a Lord who refused to leave us in our sin and who laid down his life as a sacrifice for us. We follow a Lord who chose Peter and you and me who continue to disappoint him yet he never abandons us.

Do not be conformed to this world, be conformed to Christ. Let your life take the shape by which we know him: the cross, as your life is given to break evil's hold on everyone.

It is too bad the apartments are not being built next door to this building, or in your back yard or in mine. Then we could bear the cost rather than asking others to do so. I wish that people with disabilities could be helped without complicating life for others. But again, and finally I think of Jesus. When his ministry of breaking down the gates of Hades began to upset people he did not turn back. Though they began to seek his life because he was upsetting the status quo he did not turn back.

So also I hope the people of Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry and Maximumm Independent Living will not turn back, but will continue to break down every gate and wall that imprisons.

For they and we are the church of the Son of the living God and the gates of Hades will not prevail against us. Amen.