

*21From 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."*

*24Then 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? 27"For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. 28Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."*

*Romans 12:9-21* <sup>9</sup>Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; <sup>10</sup>love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. <sup>11</sup>Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. <sup>12</sup>Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. <sup>13</sup>Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. <sup>14</sup>Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. <sup>15</sup>Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. <sup>16</sup>Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. <sup>17</sup>Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. <sup>18</sup>If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. <sup>19</sup>Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." <sup>20</sup>No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." <sup>21</sup>Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

I first heard of him in the newspaper article that reported his death. I have forgotten his name but not what the article said about his life and death. In the poor neighborhoods on the Eastside of Cleveland he was well known as someone who helped. Food, shelter, clothing, medical help – his life was devoted to seeing that everyone had these basic necessities. But one day he was stabbed to death because he was in the wrong place at the wrong time. He had gone into a dangerous place to give help – it cost him his life.

Sometime after I read of his death I was visiting a member of Christ Lutheran at Good Samaritan Nursing Home. After a number of visits to that room I learned that the roommate of the person I visited was the mother of the man who had lost his life. Once she had depended on him – she could depend on him no more.

Jesus taught his disciples, “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 will find it.”

I remember how inspired I was to read about this man – he had heard Jesus word and lived that word. He lost his life for Jesus sake. But I hope what happened to him never happens to one of my children. I hope my children follow Jesus but not too closely. I hope that they will always keep themselves safe.

That is all that Peter wanted for Jesus – that Jesus would be safe. We want that most of all for those we love – that they would be safe.

But Jesus was going to a place that would not be safe for him – Jerusalem. The elders, the chief priests and the scribes would cause him great suffering and he would be killed. But that is not all – Jesus had faith that he would be raised on the third day. When Jesus showed Peter and the other disciples that this would happen to Jesus Peter rebuked him saying, “God forbid it Lord, this must never happen to you.” Yes, all Peter wanted was for Jesus to be safe.

But Jesus 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.”

“Extend hospitality to strangers.” When I read that line to someone recently she objected, “You have to be careful about strangers – don’t you watch the news? Strangers can be dangerous these days. Things now are not the same as when Jesus was on earth.”

She is right of course, strangers can be dangerous. We have all heard stories about that. Still God calls us to be hospitable to the ones we do not know. Strangers.

“Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse them.” My natural thinking is to get even or at least to give them a piece of my mind. But God calls us to bless those who persecute us.

“Do not repay anyone evil for evil but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.” Giving people what they deserve – that is setting our minds on human things but overcoming evil with good is setting the mind on divine things.

Through the prophet Isaiah God declared, “My ways are not your ways and my thoughts are not your thoughts. For as the heavens are higher than the earth so are my thoughts higher than your thoughts and my ways higher than yours.”

Peter knew all the right words to say about Jesus – last week we heard him confess, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.” But now Peter needed to learn a new way of thinking about life – a new way of living

And so do we.

Safety for myself is not first. An eye for an eye kind of justice is not God’s way. The mercy and forgiveness that come through Jesus Christ is God’s way.

You and I are called to follow. God is overcoming evil with good. God is overcoming death with life. God is overcoming sin with forgiveness. God has done this in Jesus. God continues to do this in you when you show hospitality to strangers. And when you bless those who persecute you. And repay no one evil for evil. Live by this divine wisdom and there will be crosses aplenty in your life.

And God raising you to life – again and again and again – forever. Amen

.

.

