Last week we heard Peter say the “right thing” to Jesus when he confessed Jesus is “the Messiah, the Son of the living God”. He was praised by Jesus but was also made aware he did not come up with that on his own, rather God had revealed it to him. And today we see Peter say the “wrong thing”. Last week Peter was the rock, the foundation of the church and this week that rock becomes a stumbling block to Jesus.

Despite Peter’s right answer last week, Jesus told them in no uncertain terms could they tell this truth to anyone else. On our side of the resurrection, we are often perplexed by Jesus’ demand to the disciples not to tell. As Christians we are highly encouraged to tell the world who Jesus is. Why shouldn’t they?

It was because of their idea of what a Messiah is and what a Messiah does. While we have been so engrained that a Messiah is one who gives up his life to save our own from eternal death, that is not, at all, what they were expecting from their long ago promised Messiah. They were expecting someone to come and rescue them from those who ruled over them.

It’s hard to say if the people ever expected someone to give them eternal life or if over the centuries it developed into the Messiah being in the one who would save them from their enemies. There are only small sections of history when the Jewish people were not being ruled over by other people. Most of the Old Testament is packed with times when they were either ruled by others or enslaved by others. To them, they were waiting for the Messiah to release them from their captivity of oppression by most every other power around them.

Imagine for a moment what kind of Messiah that would be like. The Messiah, very likely, would be of royal descent. They would be strong, of course. They would have built an army to fight against the enemy. In Jesus’ time the enemy would be the Romans. They would have a commanding appearance to rally the troops. The Messiah would be trained in combat and have a “take no prisoners” mentality. They would be ready to fight and would not be defeated.

So, do you have this image in your head? Ok, now imagine you are a disciple listening to Jesus tell you that in the near future, the one you think is that Messiah, will go to Jerusalem.

 Oh yes! Isn’t that what you are thinking? It’s on! He’s going to take on the Romans!

Then he says he will suffer at the hands of the elders, chief priest and scribes. And you start to shake your head. Did you hear him right? That makes no sense.

The elders, chief priests and scribes are the three groups that make up the Sanhedrin, the supreme Jewish court. They are the governing body of the Jews in Jesus’ time. They were the elders of the Jewish religion who you greatly respect, as would any Jewish person. The Sanhedrin’s covered the whole spectrum of leaders, including both Sadducees and Pharisees. It makes no sense for them to hurt the Messiah, because these men also want to get out from under the Roman rule.

Then it gets worse. Jesus says he will be killed. That is when Peter stopped listening, maybe you did too. How could Jesus be the Messiah if he gets killed? Peter, the rock, takes Jesus aside and takes the opportunity to tell Jesus just how wrong he is. That was when the rock fell off the foundation in front of Jesus’ feet.

However, Jesus had been trained to jump over the would-be stumbling block. Jesus remembered when he was led out in the wilderness and Satan had been tempting him. The devil, Satan or the tempter, whatever you want to call him, brought Jesus to the top of a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world. Satan enticed Jesus by telling him he would give him all of it, if he were to worship him.

Jesus passed that test when he told the tempter, “Away with your Satan! For it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve only him.’” (Matthew 4:10)

And now here was Peter, being Satan to him. William Barclay, a New Testament scholar from Scotland wrote the definition of Satan as “any power which seeks to make human desires take the place of divine imperative.”1

Peter’s human desire was a very noble one. He didn’t want to see Jesus suffer and die. He didn’t want to see him give up his life for them. His mind was on human things and Jesus’ was on divine things. Jesus was sent by God to do just as he had told Peter and the rest of them. He was to suffer and die, but that was not all.

Peter had missed the most important part. God’s divine imperative or command was that on the third day Jesus would be raised. That was what God’s Messiah was all about. The human’s Messiah was about crowns and glory. God’s Messiah was about the cross and suffering. Human’s Messiah was about being the winners and all the spoils a winner receives. God’s Messiah is always on the side of the losers, those who are in need.

We sometimes look at the cross and think about what Jesus did for me, but today’s gospel tells us the cross calls us to bear our own cross for the sake of others, just as Jesus did for us. Not for glory, but for the sake of the other.

So what does it mean to take up our cross and follow Jesus? When we take up the cross, we take on the burden of sacrifice for the other. We give up ourselves for the other.

In the first verse of Romans 12, Paul tells us we are “to present ourselves as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.” When we hear sacrifice, we may think of an old “B” movie where the natives sacrifice a virgin to the volcano gods. Or we may think of Abraham getting ready to sacrifice his only son, Isaac until God provides a ram instead.

When Jesus died on the cross he sacrificed himself so we may never have to die. And out of response to God’s great love to give us everlasting life, we become a living sacrifice.

A living sacrifice is like the baseball term for a sacrifice fly. Which means when a batter hits a long, high, but catchable ball knowing he will be out, so that the runner will score. The player who hits a sacrifice fly ball is certainly a team player. They sacrifice their possible opportunity to score and make themselves look good to ensure the team will score.

But being a living sacrifice for God can be challenging. Our human desire is to take care of ourselves and those closest to us, but as we are told today in the Romans reading, we are to extend hospitality to strangers, we are to bless those who persecute us, we are to associate with the lowly, we are to live peaceably with all. We are not to repay evil with evil, or seek vengeance, rather we are to care for our enemies.

That is so hard to do, especially if we forget about the 3rd day. You see when Peter skipped by Jesus saying he would be raised on the third day, he didn’t hear about the third day and the third day makes all the difference in how we can be living sacrifices.

When we remember there was a third day. The day when Jesus was resurrected from the dead, we know that our life is forever with God.

When we remember there was a third day. The day when Jesus forever took away the penalties of our sins, we can be assured God has our backs.

When we remember there was a third day. The day when Jesus showed to the world the power of God’s love, we are ready to be a living sacrifice and give of ourselves, so others are cared for.

The Messiah, the Son of the living God has saved us. Deny yourselves, take up your cross and follow **him**. Amen.

Pastor Tammy Craker, Plentywood Lutheran Church, Plentywood, MT