

Romans 12:9-21

Matthew 16:21-28

That's How You Change The World

Dianne Loufman is the Lead Pastor at First Lutheran Church in Duluth. In a devotional she writes, "When I was pregnant with our second child, a nodule was discovered on my thyroid. I was fearful that it was cancer. I shared my fears with a friend who responded, "I can't go there." "Well, good for you," I thought, "I am there." It was such a lonely feeling that they wouldn't? couldn't? enter into my fear. In today's gospel, when Jesus shares that he must suffer and die, Peter essentially uses my friend's line, "I can't go there." Peter's focus wasn't on Jesus, but on his own pain. His heart couldn't handle losing his teacher. His mind couldn't take the alteration in his understanding of Messiah, which did not include suffering and death. How often that is how we listen—hearing how our lives will be impacted rather than entering into what is being said. Perhaps, had Peter stayed there with Jesus, he would've also heard: "on the third day be raised."¹

What a powerful testimony to what it means to be a follower of Jesus. It means being in it with others and letting others be in it with us. This being is what living in it is all about.

Let's just step back in the story a little to last week's scripture where Jesus is pleased with Peter's response to his question of "Who do you say that I am?" and Peter says "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus blesses Peter and says upon the rock of Peter's faith the church will be built.

Now it is apparent that a little time has passed between these two scenes as verse 21 says, "From 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."

So, Jesus has been going on about this, suffering and eventually of death and being raised, for some time and Peter basically says, "Okay, enough already with all this talk. Let's get this right. In order for you to be the Messiah you need to come in by force and take over the government." Well, the scripture only says, "And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.'" (v22) Kinda makes one think that Peter thought he understood Jesus' purposes better than Jesus did and that the faith, knowledge, and understanding Peter displayed earlier made him feel confident that he better set Jesus right. You can just see him, putting his arm over Jesus' shoulder, walking him to a spot away from everyone else, you know,

¹ Loufman, Dianne. [Friday, September 1, 2023 \(luthersem.edu\)](https://www.luthersem.edu). Accessed September 1, 2023.

like when you have something to say to someone and you want to appear like you got this.

Guess Jesus was not impressed because Peter goes from being a rock to a stone one might stumble over in the middle of the road. Imagine the scene continuing, Jesus turning toward Peter and saying “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.” (v23)

Now Jesus is not saying that Peter’s thinking is stupid, it is just way too small. God has bigger things in store. I have heard a saying that we can not imagine as big as God can do. That seems to be the case here. Peter only had the knowledge of his life experience which included the teachings that the Messiah would overthrow powers that oppressed. How could he have understood that the power was in a resurrected Jesus. A Messiah that suffered because of love, compassion, and grace.

We don’t think of those things as having power and being a threat and yet daily power wants more power not more grace and compassion. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control, these things are a threat to those who want to control because there is no way to control these attributes. How do you stop one from caring? Caring leads to compassion, compassion to grace, and grace to a life that is transforming, regardless of circumstances.

The chorus to the Newsboys song *That’s How You Change the World* has the words,

It's the prayer in an empty room
Little things we do when nobody's
around
A hand reaching out to a heart in
doubt
It's the smallest spark that can light
the dark
That's how you change the world

Being a follower of Jesus is about changing the world through grace-filled love. It is not about power and control, but rather just the opposite. It is about leading a life that allows room for God to lead you, guide you, and change you. In the process you get to change little things in the world...the relationship between yourself and others, the mood in the room. You get to bring hope to the hopeless, companionship to the lonely, food to the hungry, love to those who do not know love.

Will you change everyone you meet or every situation you encounter? Likely not, but if each of us is intentionally and meaningfully making decisions that align ourselves with Jesus then we are living into the part of the Lord’s prayer that say, “Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

It is going where people need you to go in their suffering and allowing people to walk with us in our suffering. And speaking of suffering. We are not to glorify suffering. We

are not called to subject ourselves to suffering in order to be more Christian, rather it is about relationships. Suffering is a part of living. It will find you. It found Jesus. Most of us are not called to die on a cross, but rather to live with the joy that there was resurrection after the cross.

That seemed to be what Peter and the disciples missed, not just in this moment, when Jesus spoke about his suffering and death, but throughout his teaching. They seemed to miss the statement that on the third day he would be raised.

We have the advantage of having the perspective of the cross and resurrection long after the fact. We get to hear the stories of vulnerability and lack of understanding, but we also hear the stories of joy, celebration, and resurrection that transforms life.

We have a story to tell about hope, about being people of God who love and have compassion because we are called to be in it with others, knowing that God is in it with us through Jesus who understands suffering to the point of death on a cross.

If you have no idea what it means to live this out then turn to the passage in Romans. These statements in and of themselves could be understood as how any good person might live, but hear them from the perspective of a Christian, as one who aligns themselves with Jesus, our Lord, who understood suffering. Hear the words again, this time from Eugene Peterson's *The Message*...

9-10 Love from the center of who you are; don't fake it. Run for dear life from evil; hold on for dear life to good. Be good friends who love deeply; practice playing second fiddle.

11-13 Don't burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Don't quit in hard times; pray all the harder. Help needy Christians; be inventive in hospitality.

14-16 Bless your enemies; no cursing under your breath. Laugh with your happy friends when they're happy; share tears when they're down. Get along with each other; don't be stuck-up. Make friends with nobodies; don't be the great somebody.

17-19 Don't hit back; discover beauty in everyone. If you've got it in you, get along with everybody. Don't insist on getting even; that's not for you to do. "I'll do the judging," says God. "I'll take care of it."

20-21 Our Scriptures tell us that if you see your enemy hungry, go buy that person lunch, or if he's thirsty, get him a drink. Your generosity will surprise him with goodness. Don't let evil get the best of you; get the best of evil by doing good.²

This is our calling. This is our cross to bear. We are the people of God in the world who can change the world through our love and compassion, working for justice on behalf of those who cannot speak for themselves, being in it with others and letting others be in it with us, knowing that the God of love, the Christ of the resurrection and the power of the Holy Spirit goes with us to love and serve in community and change the world one action, one word at a time.

² [The Message \(MSG\)](#) Copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by [Eugene H. Peterson](#)