

**8/30/26**  
**14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**  
**For Group Meetings from August 23<sup>rd</sup> – August 29<sup>th</sup>**

**OUR MISSION:** As a missional congregation we *celebrate* Christ's presence, *invite* people into a growing relationship with Jesus, and *equip* them to *serve* in a broken world.

**Prayer of the Day:** O God, we thank you for your Son, who chose the path of suffering for the sake of the world. Humble us by his example, point us to the path of obedience, and give us strength to follow your commands, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

**BIBLICAL EQUIPPING TOGETHER:**

**Share:** How did last week's scripture (Matthew 16:13-20) work in your life this week?

**Mission:**

- What was most satisfying about your ministry last week?
- Where do you see God at work?
- How did you participate in God's missional activity?
- How did inviting go last Sunday?

**Hear:** Matthew 16:21-28

**Explore Questions:** (Use these or develop your own.)

1. Why do you think Jesus chooses this moment to begin telling the disciples that he will suffer, die, and be raised?
2. What does Jesus say his followers must do?
3. What do you make of Jesus calling Peter "Satan"? Why such a strong response?

**Connect Questions:** (Use these or develop your own.)

1. What are you most afraid of losing?
2. What is something in your life right now that you are having difficulty accepting?
3. Where do you find yourself measuring your worth by what you accomplish, earn, own, or achieve?

**Memorize this verse:** "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it." (Matthew 16:25) Where in your life are you holding on tightly because you are afraid of losing something, and what might it mean to trust God enough to loosen your grip?

**BIBLICAL EQUIPPING APART:**

**Obey:** During this week follow through on your intentions.

**Meditate:** Meditate on Psalm 26:1-8. How does this speak into your life?

**Reflect:** What have I learned in my week of living with this text? What can I share with my group when we next meet?

### Notes for ChristCare leaders:

Can you imagine? One moment, Jesus is saying you're "the rock on which I will build my church" and the next he's calling you "a stumbling block." That's not just great word play, from cornerstone to stumbling block, but such a reversal of fortune that it had to be incredibly painful. Can you imagine? And perhaps that's the difficulty. Peter couldn't imagine. He couldn't imagine that Jesus had come not just to comfort people but to free them. Comforting isn't that hard. Just give them a little more of what they already had and tell them it will be alright. But freedom is different. Freedom requires that they see that what they have isn't life-giving in the first place.

The common assumption is that when Peter declared that Jesus was the Messiah, he had in mind a warrior-king like David, one who would drive out the Romans and liberate the Israelites. When you stop to think about it, that's a pretty understandable, even reasonable hope. The Romans were foreign occupiers, not only imposing Roman law but taxing the people to support their occupation and backing up their occupation, order, and taxation by violence. The problem with Peter's expectation is that not that it's unreasonable, but that it doesn't change anything. Rome is there in force and by violence. Jesus the warrior-king uses greater force and violence to drive them out. Eventually, someone with even more force or willing to do greater violence takes over yet again. Who's in charge may change, but wheel of force and violence keeps revolving. Jesus knows this. He knows that by introducing a different logic, one that runs by forgiveness, mercy, and love rather than retribution, violence, and hate, he is challenging the powers that be. Moreover, he knows that the wheel of force and violence will not tolerate his obstruction but run him over. And this Peter just couldn't imagine. It isn't surprising, when you stop to think about it, that Jesus was killed. From the moment of his birth, he is such a threat to the rule of force and violence that Herod is willing to slaughter all children under the age of two in the hope of destroying him.

No, it's no surprise that Jesus was killed. What's surprising is that God raised Jesus from the dead. Resurrection reinforces that Jesus' life, love, and sacrifice are ultimately what will prevail. It's hard to imagine in light of how prevalent power and violence seem in the world. But it is just what Jesus invites us to: lives shaped by love and forgiveness and actions shaped by compassion and hope. It's all so very hard to imagine. Like Peter, what we most often want is a little more of what the world already offers; be it force or security or wealth or status or popularity or whatever. But Jesus didn't come to comfort us with a little more, but instead to free us. And freedom first means realizing that we've settled for something that isn't life giving, so that we can hear God's promise of not just more of the same but something different. So that we can hear God's promise of life, a promise that means something only after what we'd previously accepted as life dies. And here's the thing, we don't need to hear that the world has disappointed us or that we've settled for less than God hopes. The evidence is all around. The disappointing relationship, the illness that returned, the career that ended, the untimely death mourned, the disappointment looming.

So are you ready for something different, for something more? Because that is what Jesus promises. And that's the hard part. Because giving someone another chance instead of writing them off, forgiving someone who has wronged us instead of seeking retribution, being open-handed and generous with the resources we've been blessed with instead of holding onto whatever we can, offering our future to God rather than planning each step, seeking joy in service rather than acquisition because we've accepted that what the world has offered is all there is, these different things often feel at first like death, even like dying on the cross, before God uses them to raise us to new life. It's an act of imagination. But as we take even these small steps forward, God is at work, giving us a taste of life we'd never thought possible and multiplying the impact of our actions far beyond what we'd dreamed. Until suddenly, just as it felt like we'd lost our lives, we find them.

**Thanks be to God,**

Pastor Thadd ([tbook@desertcross.org](mailto:tbook@desertcross.org))

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#### *Traditional version:*

Our Father who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
As we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from  
evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power,  
And the glory, forever and ever. Amen

#### *Contemporary version:*

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,  
your will be done on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those  
Who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial  
And deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the  
power, and the glory are yours,  
Now and forever. Amen