



## St John Lutheran Church

1017 Montana  
Libby, MT 59923  
(406)293-4024

Text: Luke 9: 18-24

Theme: Life's most Pressing Question

**We have before** us today the great question of all time. **Who do you** say that Jesus is? **Is He the** Lord of Life, the only begotten Son of the Father... **all** powerful, **all** knowing and omni-present? **Is He that** Lord of all who can be wherever He promises to be, in baptism and in the Holy Supper? **Is Jesus that** Jesus... **or is** He somehow a second class son of God who cannot deliver on His promise...**not being** able to be in His Supper...**not able** to rise from the dead? **Not able to keep His Promise?** **Who do you** say that Jesus is? **There cannot be** a more important question put to you personally and to the Church corporately... **for the** answer reveals much about your faith...**and our** faith and how we respond to that faith.

**Our Gospel account** in Luke of this incident has a parallel account in the Gospel of St. Matthew, and Matthew tell us the events of today took place in Caesarea Philippi... **the very** most northern fringe of the region of the Galilee. **This region was** inhabited by those who worshipped pagan gods and to this day there still remain shrines in that area dedicated to those gods. **It seems odd**, at first, that our Lord would pick such a place to pose this very important question to His followers.

**But then again** our Lord's wisdom is always perfect. **There in that** place Jesus was getting ready to sort things out with His followers...**to test** them, **to see** what was in their hearts. **"Are you following me, alone? Or am I just one of many you choose to follow? Am I one of many prophets? Or am I thee Prophet? Am I one of these many gods we have around us? Or am I THEE Son of the ONLY TRUE GOD? It's time to clear the air boys, what do you truly believe about me?" Who do you say that I am??"**

**Peter responds in** faith and says **"you are the Christ of God!"** **This response is** the very foundation of the Christian Church. **It is the** very foundation of our God given and God sustained faith. **This statement is** the dividing line between those who are Christian and those who are not... **between those** who believe and those who do not. **This is the** question that includes or excludes those who are to have eternal life and those who will be condemned. **There is only** one God given response that we can make and be saved...**"You are the Christ of God!"** **No other answer** will do, for no other answer is true or complete.

**We give that** response... **and then** like good Lutherans we ask the question we learned from the *Catechism*, **"what does this mean?"** **Well, Jesus tells** us as He launches into His first prediction about His coming Passion. **He heads from** Caesarea Philippi to Jerusalem, where it all will take place. **His betrayal**, His suffering, His death and finally His Resurrection.

**Jesus heard the** commitment from His disciples...**He heard** them confess the faith of the Church, **"You are the Christ!"** **Then He tells** them what He must suffer... **and on** the heels of that Jesus makes the very sobering statement, as well as a challenging statement to Christian commitment: **"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me...whoever loses his life for me will save it."** **This statement by** Jesus is made seven times in Scripture... **so it** must be important... **something we** need to pay attention to and heed.

**Our Lord challenges** each of us here. **He challenges each** one of us and the commitment we have for Himself and the Church. **Do we just** talk the talk... **or do** we actually walk the walk? **We need to** notice that Jesus challenges our commitment **after He explains His own commitment** to us and to His Father. **In the Passion** prediction in verse 22, Jesus signals His own willingness to loose His Life in order that He might save us. **And now we** are called to loose our lives in Christ... **in order** that Christ may save us. **This teaching** is mentioned again in Paul's teaching on baptism... **where we** are buried with Christ in baptism and rise to life from that baptism, "in Christ."

**Why should we** be willing to do that? **Why should we** be willing to give our lives to Christ in a manner? **And by the way**, taking up or bearing the Cross is more than being saddled with the difficulties of this life. **It's more than** putting up with an unreasonable boss, living with an unappreciative spouse or handling a rebellious child. **It's much more** than enduring health problems or financial difficulties.

**Bearing the Cross** is making sacrifices because of our faith. **It's choosing to** do things you might not normally do, **but do** because faith requires it... **because you** love your Lord and you know that He wants you to act in a certain way. **It can be** choosing to **NOT** do things that we would perhaps like to do... **but know** that such things are not pleasing to our God... **and** our faith and commitment require us to forego these things because of Christ. **This sounds like** Law talk...**but bear** with me for a minute,, **because it's** not!

**And why would** we willingly give up such things? **Why would we** willingly hold to a faith that will put us at odds with the world?? **We do this NOT** because we have to...**not** because it will somehow gain us a better place in Heaven. **No! We do** such things because of what Christ has done for us! **Because of the** sacrifice that He made for us! **He gave up** His Life so that we might live! **And He gave** His Life in the most tortuous way possible...**on** the Cross, the cruelest technique ever devised for executing people! **He gives us forgiveness and Life...this is Gospel! Knowing this...we can** do no other than what our Lord asks of us...**because** of His Love and devotion to us...**we respond** in faith (the very faith He gives us) because we are His! **We are the** redeemed children of God and we were purchased with the very Blood of Christ Himself! **We willingly do** these things because our Lord has given us His Name...**we are** Christians...**that is who we are!**

**Many people of** the world think that this is just plain stupid. **Life is too** short, and unpredictable...**you have** to have fun while you can...**you have** to seize life while it can be had. **Do anything you** want to do while you can...**have fun**, enjoy the moment...**eat drink** and be merry for tomorrow you may die! **Don't pass on** a thing, go everywhere, buy everything, enjoy it all!

**Then our Lord** says: "**If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me...whoever loses his life for me will save it!**"

**My friends, we** are the New Israel. **The chosen people** of God. **Scripture tells us** that we are to love God with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our mind. **And how do** we show this?? 1st John 5:3 "**This is the love of God; to obey His Commands. And His Commands are not burdensome.**" Jesus tells us in Matthew 11:30 "**My yoke is easy and my burden is light.**" **But, how can** this be?? **How can something** be a burden and yet be a light burden at the same time??

**Consider the reward.** **We don't live** for Christ to earn something... **most especially** our salvation. **The reward** we have been given was earned a long time before we ever came to faith by the work of the Holy Spirit. **But there is a "here and now"** reward... **and that** reward is important. **In following our** Lord's Commands...**in doing** the things that our Lord asks of us... **we receive** His blessing, His Peace, and His joy. **This is Gospel! That is the** great blessing of following our Lord's Commands. **The Law cannot** save us for we cannot keep it. **But the Law** is the expression of how our God wants us to live. **The Law guides** us to the place where God

wants to bless us. **Following our Lord's** Commandments means we follow God's way, and in doing that... **with God's** help, we accomplish His purpose here in this time and in this place!

**Living the way** God wants us to live will not make us better people. **But living the way** God wants us to live will help us to avoid many of the miseries that people bring on themselves. **If you never** lie, you don't have to remember what you told someone. **If you don't** commit murder, or theft, you don't have to worry about going to jail. **If you don't** commit adultery, you don't have to worry about contracting AIDS or crushing that special person who God gave to you in the Holy Estate of marriage.

**God knows that** satan is indeed a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. **Satan seeks to** destroy what God builds up and calls good. **He entices us** with the alluring and tempting things of the world so that he might lead us away from God...**and** this, so that he might destroy us.

**"If anyone would come after me, he must take up his cross daily and follow me... whoever loses his life for me will save it."**

**All people will** suffer the maladies of this world. **In one way** or another, whether it is sooner or later, all people will suffer from health problems...**all** people will suffer the grief of losing a loved one...**all** people will age and soon whither...**all** people will face their own mortality and come to the realization that we are here for just a moment...**for** just a heart beat in the time line of the universe... **and** then we are gone. **This is the** common human experience.

**Yet it is** the Christian who is called to pick up his or her cross and turn their back on the temptations and troubles of the world and the devil. **We are called** to forego some of the things that may feel good for the moment, but have eternal consequences. **We are called** to contend for the faith...**to** live according to our Lord's teaching and to be a witness of God's presence in the insanity of this world!

**Why do we** do this?? **Because we can** do no other! **The Lord of** Life has purchased us with His own Blood and He has made us His own so that He may bestow upon us His eternal reward...**His** eternal blessing...**a** reward and blessing that will not last just for the moment, **but will** last forever!

**Today...we have** seen a miracle...**right here** in this place. **We saw Christ** keep His Promise to save His people. **Right here...we saw** Jesus cross time and eternity so that He might make little Mandy Taylor Schmitt His own. **Our Lord has** given her His Name...**and with** His Name He also gave her His death and His Resurrection. **This little infant** has died and been raised again in Christ. **With His Word** and Promise joined to water... **Mandy's sins** have been washed away and in that baptism Christ has given her Himself. **From this day** forward Mandy lives in Christ. **She may bear** His Cross through the hardships we all face in this life...**but He** will always be with her and she will never be alone...**God now** lives in her...**and as** she grows in stature and in faith...**she will** live for her Lord. **This is a** great and profound mystery but this is what it means to be Christian!!

**Jesus the Christ,** the anointed Son of the only True God wants to give us all He has earned for us. **And so we** willingly give our lives daily to this Christ because He has loved us with an everlasting and perfect love. **We daily and** willingly give our lives to the One who gave up His Life so that we might live. **In the Name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit...Amen.**

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Rev. Eric M. Christiansen  
St. John Lutheran Church  
Libby, Montana

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