

Matthew 16:21-28  
Get behind me, Satan!  
Pentecost 13  
August 29,30 2020  
Prince of Peace, Topeka

I have struggled with my name my whole life. I don't know how many times I have been asked, "Is Rocky your real name?". Sometimes I reply, "No. My parents didn't give me a real name." Other times I attempt to be more sophisticated than I really am. I explain that my father named me after Peter. Peter's name was kind of the "Rocky" version of Greek. But the truth is my Dad didn't know that. Rocky Marciano was retiring in 1956, and my Dad saw the name in the newspaper and liked the sound of it.

I wonder how Peter felt about his new name. In last week's Gospel Lesson we read how Simon, son of Jonah, was renamed Peter based about the solid confession of his faith. Every time someone called him Peter, he had to remember how he got that name.

That was last week's lesson. This week shows a different view of Simon, Son of Jonah. Now Jesus is calling him Satan and telling him to get behind him. Jesus rebukes Peter because Peter thought it wrong for Jesus to die.

Luther explained this simultaneity with the Latin phrase, Simul iustus et peccator = At the same time sinner and saint.

Children are wonderful at living this simultaneity out in their lives. The same little kid that was so cute you just wanted to hug them, can within seconds become the brat you want to swat on the behind – I didn't say do, I said want to do it.

We know this about ourselves. But I think instead of a simultaneity we view it as more a spectrum. We see ourselves and others as living somewhere on the spectrum between saintliness and sinnerliness. This is a huge misrepresentation on our behalf. We are not somewhere on the spectrum between sinner and saint, we are at both ends of the spectrum simultaneously all the time.

You can be listening to the sermon. Finding something in it that is useful. In the next nanosecond you are daydreaming about what you hope to find time to do Sunday afternoon. We have no capacity (on our own) to be anywhere other than on both ends of the spectrum simultaneously.

It is our sinful nature that keeps us all the way to the farthest side of sinfulness. We rightly say we are poor miserable sinners, because we are. And left to our own devices we would be right with Peter telling Jesus to not die. Peter didn't want to be left without Jesus. And Peter probably thought he could get saved without Jesus death. But he could not and we cannot. Without Jesus' death we would be doomed.

But because of Jesus' death, we get to say that at the same time we are always saints. This isn't just a wish for what we will be like in heaven. In God's eyes we are saints now. It is not because God has poor eyesight. God sees us clearly. And when he sees us he sees the perfect life of Jesus as though it were our own. God sees saints.

When we see ourselves as merely somewhere on the spectrum between saints and sinners, I think we present ourselves to the world as more saintly than we really are and believe in our hearts that we are much worse sinners than we really are. We judge ourselves harshly – and sometimes even more harshly because we know we are no where as good as we try to look others. That leaves us not being true about our own sin and not being true about how we are saved.

We also do this with one another. We often judge others on a scale between 1 and 10, with 1 being bad sinners and 10 being wonderful saints. We think we are better than those we judge on the lower side of the scale and think we can never be as good as those on the saintly side of the scale. It leads us to a false belief about ourselves and others.

Jesus saw Peter as a great man of faith who could clearly confess who Jesus was because the Holy Spirit had convinced Peter of that faith. But Jesus also saw the Satan in Peter when Peter didn't want Jesus to die.

Jesus sees you as a saint because he has died to make you a saint and the Holy Spirit has convinced you of faith in him. Jesus also sees the Satanic side of us when think we can get to heaven on our own good works, and he wants us to get out of his way. I wonder how many times each day I get in God's way of his trying to bring me salvation.

When we can recognize that we are both sinners and saints, we can be honest with ourselves that we are not going to get to heaven on our own power. We can be more humble with one another when we see each other as saints who still sin. We can judge ourselves less harshly for seemingly living a two-faced lie. We can judge one another less harshly for seeing them as two-faced liars as well. We are all always two faced – sinner and at the same time saints.

This does not mean we get to be content with our sin and sin all we want. God has revealed to us what sin is because he wants us to live the best lives possible. And living according to God's Word is the best life that is possible. God didn't give us 10 Commandments so that he could control us and keep us in line. He gave us 10 Commandments so that could experience the best life that is possible.

None of us can live that life perfectly in this world. We are simul iustus et peccator after all. But we can get a taste of what it will be like to live as Saints while we still live in this world so that we can look forward to living as just Saints in the world to come.

That is how we can deny ourselves and take up our crosses and follow Jesus. “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life? For the Son of Man is going to come with angels in the glory of his father and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.”

There will come a day of judgement. But we do not have to live our lives as those doomed from the beginning. Jesus gave his life so that we could live ours without fear of God’s judgement, without the guilt of self judgement and without the hate of judging others.

May God help us to see ourselves and one another as sinners and saints. Know that while we are all far from perfect, we are all made perfect through Jesus love.

Amen.