

Service 30 August 2026

Trinity 13

Hymns:

464 Take my life

560 Will you come and follow me?

465 Take up thy cross

255 It is a thing most wonderful

Sermon

Well, here's Peter again. Putting his foot in it. Again. Poor old thing: he's gone from the Rock, - the foundation of the church, holding the keys of heaven, - to Satan in just a few short verses. I'm amazed the poor man's mind survived!

I see Peter as Everyman – the ordinary person trying to muddle their way through life. Failing to understand a lot until it is far too late. And as a result, offending his best friend. Fortunately for

Peter, his best friend is Jesus, who forgives easily and doesn't bear grudges.

But in this story, I think about Jesus, and how he felt. He is telling his disciples what is going to happen to him very soon. That alone must have taken courage. Can you imagine holding that secret in and then finding the courage to tell your best friends that you are going to be arrested and crucified? They all knew exactly what that involved. How shaming and cruel and painful it was. No wonder Peter takes him on one side and says ' Hang on! We can't let this happen!! No!'

Jesus must have been feeling quite emotionally raw at this point to turn on Peter and call him Satan. Is it because he wants to avoid the death that he knows is coming, and reacts badly to Peter suggesting he avoids it, simply because that is exactly what Jesus wants to do. Think about how, in the Garden of Gethsemane, he prays to God his father and asks him to take this cup away from him. He's terrified at this point, and rightly so. Yet he still submits to the father. Not my will but

yours. So Peter's comments must have been very hard to handle. And he chastises Peter harshly, because he knows that he has to choose God's will, not man's will.

Jesus is pointing, in the passage, to the quintessential life choice that we have to make: do we choose the material things or the spiritual? If we choose the material – the things of our life here on earth – then we die to the spiritual. If we choose the spiritual, then we die to the material and gain eternal life. Which do we want?

When we are faced with choice, we often look at the gains and losses of making each choice. What are we willing to sacrifice and what do we want to gain? This is what we have to decide, and keep on deciding. Jesus wants us to make the choices he does: to follow the spiritual life and not the material, even though the spiritual path means that, like him, we have to take up our cross. And we take it up knowing that the cross is likely to be pain. We need to know that bigger picture before we can make wise choices.

Peter doesn't yet understand the big picture. He only knows that he doesn't want his best mate to be crucified with all that that entails, both for Jesus and for his followers. He doesn't want to lose his own (material) life – remember how he's so afraid of that that he denies that he knows Jesus three times, when Jesus is finally arrested. It is only after the resurrection, when Jesus asks him three times (note that three) 'Peter, do you love me?' and then gives him the commission to care for his people, that Peter finally begins to understand.

How then can we understand what choices God is offering us? Beyond the material/spiritual path. Only by listening. By being still, quieting our minds and opening ourselves up to allowing God to speak.

How we know that what we are hearing really is the voice of God is for another sermon, but I promise you: you WILL know!