

Sunday 30th August 2026. Trinity 13. Benefice Holy
Communion Oswaldkirk

Last Sunday we read in the Gospel when Jesus asked, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter declared, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus called him blessed and spoke of a rock on which the church would be built. Yet, in the same conversation, the rock became a stumbling block. Peter moved from confession to correction, taking Jesus aside and insisting that suffering and death must never happen to him.

What happened? Peter knew the truth, but he did not yet know the whole truth. He recognised Jesus’ identity, but misunderstood Jesus’ mission. He wanted a Messiah with glory but no grief, a crown but no cross, victory without sacrifice. How often are we like Peter? We gladly welcome the Christ who comforts, provides, heals, and blesses. But when Christ calls us into costly obedience, patient endurance, or self-denial, we may quietly say, “Surely not, Lord.”

Jesus said that he must go to Jerusalem, suffer, be killed, and be raised. The cross was not an unfortunate interruption to his work; it stood at the heart of his saving mission. Peter’s protest sounded loving, but it tempted Jesus to turn from the Father’s way. That is why the rebuke was so severe: “Get behind me, Satan!” or ‘Tempter’. Peter was not the enemy, but his advice echoed the ancient temptation to seek the kingdom without obedience and glory without sacrifice.

We should notice something here: sincere intentions are not always faithful intentions. It is possible to love Jesus and still resist his way. It is possible to speak from

affection and yet place human comfort above God's purpose. Therefore, discipleship requires more than sincerity; it requires a mind continually shaped by God. We must ask not only, "Does this feel safe?" but also, "Is this faithful?"

Peter seems to hear the suffering and death, but not the final words: "and on the third day be raised." Fear often does that. It fixes our attention on the darkest sentence and makes us miss God's promise at the end. The disciples could not yet comprehend what Jesus was saying. But on Easter morning, the impossible became reality. The crucified Lord stood alive among them.

Resurrection does not deny the pain of the cross; it declares that pain will not have the last word. Sin will not have the last word. Failure will not have the last word. Even death will not have the last word. Because Christ is risen, Christians can face hardship without surrendering to despair. Our hope does not rest on easy circumstances, but on the living Jesus.

Jesus then turns from his own cross to ours: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." Taking up the cross is not merely tolerating inconvenience. It is surrendering the right to make self-interest the centre of life. It means choosing truth when dishonesty would be easier, forgiveness when resentment feels justified, generosity when selfishness feels safer, and service when recognition seems more attractive.

This self-denial is not self-hatred. Jesus does not ask us to believe that our lives have no value. He asks us to entrust our lives to him, because he alone knows what life is for.

The great paradox of the gospel is that when we clutch life tightly, we lose it; when we give ourselves to Christ, we discover life in its fullness. A life spent only protecting itself becomes small. A life offered in love becomes abundant.

So where are you tempted to say, “Surely not, Lord”? Perhaps Christ is calling you to make peace with someone, to release a cherished ambition, to serve without applause, to remain faithful in a difficult season, or to speak with courage and compassion. The call may be costly, but we do not carry the cross alone. The One who goes before us is the crucified and risen Lord. He meets us with grace, strengthens us by his Spirit, and leads us towards life.

Today, let us ask for the whole truth: eyes to recognise Jesus, faith to trust his cross and resurrection, and courage to follow him. Let us put down the world’s measures of success and set our minds on the things of God. For the road of self-giving love may look like loss, but in Christ it is the road that leads home.

Thanks be to God. Amen.