

Out of His Way and In His Way
Romans 12:9-21 and Matthew 16:21-28
Towson PC 3 September 2017
Rev. William Nickels

Preface

As we prepare to listen to a portion of Matthew's gospel this morning, I want to set the scene for you... particularly any of you who were not here last Sunday when Joel focused on the preceding verses.

If you **were** here (and if you were listening!), you know that at this point in the story, Jesus and the disciples are out on the road together...

preaching and teaching and feeding and healing and **challenging** people by telling them that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near... that it was even **then upon** them.

And the people are wondering just who Jesus is?

Elijah, perhaps? Or Jeremiah? Or one of the **other** prophets?

Or, maybe John the Baptist... who'd somehow been raised from the dead and was back at work?

All kinds of **possibilities** are being floated by folks.

But, Jesus asks his disciples, *Who do **you** say that I am?*

For a time, I imagine, everything went silent as words started forming in the minds of Christ's followers.

You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, Simon Peter finally offers.

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah – for my Father himself has revealed this to you.

Now, reading from Matthew, Chapter 16, beginning at verse 21 –

From that time on, Jesus began to **show** his disciples that he must **go to Jerusalem** and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and **be killed**, and on the third day **be raised**.

And Peter **took him** aside and began to rebuke him, saying, *God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you!*

But he turned and said to Peter, *Get **behind** me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.*

Then Jesus told his disciples, *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*

For the word of God in scripture,
for the word of God among us,
for the word of God within us,
Thanks be to God.

Jesus began to show Peter and the other disciples that he must go... go to **Jerusalem**... and **undergo** great suffering... and be killed... and on the third day be raised.

He began to **show** them.

Now, to be honest, we don't know **what** that **means**, exactly.

Matthew didn't say that Jesus began to **tell** them he had to go, but rather, that he started to **show** them.

So it had to involve something **more** than speech.

I think he must have done something physical, like turning in the **direction** of Jerusalem and heading **off** that way...

maybe **pantomiming** suffering... and dying... and maybe even being resurrected.

Whatever it was, it's not spelled out.

But, whatever he **did**, we know that it moved Peter **profoundly** and **physically**.

We **know** this... because we're told that Peter **took** Jesus. He took Jesus **aside**... and rebuked him.

Now I **picture** that strong-armed fisherman jumping up in **front** of Jesus, grabbing him and then pushing him back and off the road, while declaring, *This must never happen to you!*

It's an image of a follower **asserting authority** over a leader, taking **control**... or **trying** to... a kind of a *coupe*.

But Jesus would have none of it. **Turning** away from Peter, he said, *Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me, here... standing in my way.*

Christ had somewhere to **go**, somewhere he knew he **must** go –

I must go to Jerusalem, and suffer, and be killed, and be raised.

And he would not allow anyone to hinder him as he went that way.

Peter **tried** to... putting up some **resistance**.

So, Jesus put Peter **in his place** – put him back **behind** him.

A **disciple's** proper **place**, we are shown, is **behind** Jesus.

Now, *disciple* is a word many of us would use in describing ourselves.

So, let me ask **you** now, are you **behind** Jesus?

Are you letting him lead you? Are you accepting his direction?

Are you listening **consciously** for his voice, his call, his instruction?

Are you responding to him faithfully, **following** as he goes?

Or, are **you** jumping up in front of him and blocking his way?

Are you **preventing** him from proceeding on the path he has chosen... **hindering** him from **taking you** where he wants and needs you to be?

Are you saying things like:

*Now, wait a minute, Jesus. How about letting **me** lead. I **know** where we need to go. I know where we ought to be heading.*

And, I know how to get us there without all this suffering and conflict and effort. My God, who wants that? Who needs that? Not you. Not me!

*Let **me** lead, Jesus. Let me take the **wheel**. I know a better road to steer us down than the one **you've** chosen.*

I know a smoother road, an easier way we can go than the one you're proposing - OK?

Maybe, like Peter, we **have** at times gotten up in **front** of Jesus to block the way, to **turn** him from the course he's set.

Or, maybe you're **considering** doing it **now**... in light of where he seems to be leading you, personally... or where it looks like he's taking this community of faith.

Well, I've a hunch that **our** Lord's not likely to allow **any** one to hinder him for **long**. He certainly didn't let Peter.

*Get **behind** me*, he said with that voice of **command**.

(And you can be **sure** that's **just** what Peter **did**!)

*Get **behind** me*, he calls out now to us, commanding and urging **us**, as well. *And follow... follow **me**... your **Lord**.*

Honestly, friend – are you man, woman or child **enough** to **refuse** him?

He has so **much** authority; and he is so faithful, and wise, and so full of **love** for us; and he is so trustworthy – like no one else in the whole wide world.

Why ever **would** we **refuse** him?

Well, at any rate, soon **enough**, that day, Christ **was** on his way.

He'd made it pretty **clear** that, while it was a way that would cost him dearly, it would, in the **end**, bring him **into life**...

into resurrection life... life in **all** fullness...

life in comparison to which the suffering would be as nothing.

And for everyone who followed him, it would be the **same**.

Even **as** they traveled that way **together**, in **spite** of the challenges, the hardship and the suffering they'd face, Christ's disciples would sense the **quality** of that rich, full life that was coming.

They'd sense its abundance overflowing the future, spilling back into their lives.

They would **sense** it in the **pleasure** they'd feel being on the road with Jesus...

in the **satisfaction** they'd feel while helping him work;

in the **reassurance** they'd feel whenever they shared a meal or prayed with him;

in the **consolation** that would come when they suffered along with him and for his sake;

and in the **joy** they'd feel while worshipping the Living God.

They would sense it. And **you and I** – don't we sense it, too, as we follow in our Savior's way?

Satisfaction. Reassurance. Consolation. Joy!

*In **this** world, you **have** tribulation – **indeed!** But, be of good cheer – I have **overcome** the world! Come along, and come over **with** me!*

His disciples sense... they **know as they go**... that they are following their Master **into Life... abundant Life**...

as long as they **are** following him... not ignoring him... not hindering him... but following him...

as **long** as they're **behind** him.

Are **you** behind him now? Are you **following** Christ, your leader?

Are you staying out of his way... and are you in his way?

Well, friends, here at Towson Presbyterian – it seems that Christ **is** leading you... that you're on your way **together** to something new.

Your Lord is **taking** you where **he** wants you to go... to become, along with Rob and Joel, what **he** intends for you to become... to do what God needs you to do for his sake in this community.

I sense that you're energized and grateful and hopeful as you engage with Christ's help in a vigorous ministry;

Maybe you're becoming the **angels** he promised he'd be bringing with him one day.

You're not angels yet. (Well, a few of you might be!)

But surely there are tendencies... there is promise!

And Christ is a **most** capable, winsome and loving leader!

So I do not doubt but that, one day, I shall see you in that light.

I have **reason** to hope so! And so do **all** of you.

Finally, as we prepare to move toward celebrating Holy Communion with our Lord, I want to circle back to the Epistle lesson paired with the gospel for this day.

I'd like us to hear once more Paul's good guidance, God's life-giving counsel for disciples like us:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;

love one another with mutual affection;

outdo one another in showing honour.

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

As those to whom Christ has extended holy hospitality, you and I have much to celebrate, much to receive and much to offer as we follow in his way.

Thanks be to God for that!

Out of His Way and In His Way
Romans 12:9-21 and Matthew 16:21-28
Towson PC 3 September 2017
Rev. William Nickels

Preface

As we prepare to listen to a portion of Matthew's gospel this morning, I want to set the scene for you... particularly any of you who were not here last Sunday when Joel focused on the preceding verses.

If you **were** here (and if you were listening!), you know that at this point in the story, Jesus and the disciples are out on the road together...

preaching and teaching and feeding and healing and **challenging** people by telling them that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near... that it was even **then upon** them.

And the people are wondering just who Jesus is?

Elijah, perhaps? Or Jeremiah? Or one of the **other** prophets?

Or, maybe John the Baptist... who'd somehow been raised from the dead and was back at work?

All kinds of **possibilities** are being floated by folks.

But, Jesus asks his disciples, *Who do **you** say that I am?*

For a time, I imagine, everything went silent as words started forming in the minds of Christ's followers.

You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, Simon Peter finally offers.

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah – for my Father himself has revealed this to you.

Now, reading from Matthew, Chapter 16, beginning at verse 21 –

From that time on, Jesus began to **show** his disciples that he must **go to Jerusalem** and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and **be killed**, and on the third day **be raised**.

And Peter **took him** aside and began to rebuke him, saying, *God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you!*

But he turned and said to Peter, *Get **behind** me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.*

Then Jesus told his disciples, *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*

For the word of God in scripture,
for the word of God among us,
for the word of God within us,
Thanks be to God.

Jesus began to show Peter and the other disciples that he must go... go to **Jerusalem**... and **undergo** great suffering... and be killed... and on the third day be raised.

He began to **show** them.

Now, to be honest, we don't know **what** that **means**, exactly.

Matthew didn't say that Jesus began to **tell** them he had to go, but rather, that he started to **show** them.

So it had to involve something **more** than speech.

I think he must have done something physical, like turning in the **direction** of Jerusalem and heading **off** that way...

maybe **pantomiming** suffering... and dying... and maybe even being resurrected.

Whatever it was, it's not spelled out.

But, whatever he **did**, we know that it moved Peter **profoundly** and **physically**.

We **know** this... because we're told that Peter **took** Jesus. He took Jesus **aside**... and rebuked him.

Now I **picture** that strong-armed fisherman jumping up in **front** of Jesus, grabbing him and then pushing him back and off the road, while declaring, *This must never happen to you!*

It's an image of a follower **asserting authority** over a leader, taking **control**... or **trying** to... a kind of a *coupe*.

But Jesus would have none of it. **Turning** away from Peter, he said, *Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me, here... standing in my way.*

Christ had somewhere to **go**, somewhere he knew he **must** go –

I must go to Jerusalem, and suffer, and be killed, and be raised.

And he would not allow anyone to hinder him as he went that way.

Peter **tried** to... putting up some **resistance**.

So, Jesus put Peter **in his place** – put him back **behind** him.

A **disciple's** proper **place**, we are shown, is **behind** Jesus.

Now, *disciple* is a word many of us would use in describing ourselves.

So, let me ask **you** now, are you **behind** Jesus?

Are you letting him lead you? Are you accepting his direction?

Are you listening **consciously** for his voice, his call, his instruction?

Are you responding to him faithfully, **following** as he goes?

Or, are **you** jumping up in front of him and blocking his way?

Are you **preventing** him from proceeding on the path he has chosen... **hindering** him from **taking you** where he wants and needs you to be?

Are you saying things like:

*Now, wait a minute, Jesus. How about letting **me** lead. I **know** where we need to go. I know where we ought to be heading.*

And, I know how to get us there without all this suffering and conflict and effort. My God, who wants that? Who needs that? Not you. Not me!

*Let **me** lead, Jesus. Let me take the **wheel**. I know a better road to steer us down than the one **you've** chosen.*

I know a smoother road, an easier way we can go than the one you're proposing - OK?

Maybe, like Peter, we **have** at times gotten up in **front** of Jesus to block the way, to **turn** him from the course he's set.

Or, maybe you're **considering** doing it **now**... in light of where he seems to be leading you, personally... or where it looks like he's taking this community of faith.

Well, I've a hunch that **our** Lord's not likely to allow **any** one to hinder him for **long**. He certainly didn't let Peter.

*Get **behind** me*, he said with that voice of **command**.

(And you can be **sure** that's **just** what Peter **did**!)

*Get **behind** me*, he calls out now to us, commanding and urging **us**, as well. *And follow... follow **me**... your **Lord**.*

Honestly, friend – are you man, woman or child **enough** to **refuse** him?

He has so **much** authority; and he is so faithful, and wise, and so full of **love** for us; and he is so trustworthy – like no one else in the whole wide world.

Why ever **would** we **refuse** him?

Well, at any rate, soon **enough**, that day, Christ **was** on his way.

He'd made it pretty **clear** that, while it was a way that would cost him dearly, it would, in the **end**, bring him **into life**...

into resurrection life... life in **all** fullness...

life in comparison to which the suffering would be as nothing.

And for everyone who followed him, it would be the **same**.

Even **as** they traveled that way **together**, in **spite** of the challenges, the hardship and the suffering they'd face, Christ's disciples would sense the **quality** of that rich, full life that was coming.

They'd sense its abundance overflowing the future, spilling back into their lives.

They would **sense** it in the **pleasure** they'd feel being on the road with Jesus...

in the **satisfaction** they'd feel while helping him work;

in the **reassurance** they'd feel whenever they shared a meal or prayed with him;

in the **consolation** that would come when they suffered along with him and for his sake;

and in the **joy** they'd feel while worshipping the Living God.

They would sense it. And **you and I** – don't we sense it, too, as we follow in our Savior's way?

Satisfaction. Reassurance. Consolation. Joy!

*In **this** world, you **have** tribulation – **indeed!** But, be of good cheer – I have **overcome** the world! Come along, and come over **with** me!*

His disciples sense... they **know as they go**... that they are following their Master **into Life... abundant Life**...

as long as they **are** following him... not ignoring him... not hindering him... but following him...

as **long** as they're **behind** him.

Are **you** behind him now? Are you **following** Christ, your leader?

Are you staying out of his way... and are you in his way?

Well, friends, here at Towson Presbyterian – it seems that Christ **is** leading you... that you're on your way **together** to something new.

Your Lord is **taking** you where **he** wants you to go... to become, along with Rob and Joel, what **he** intends for you to become... to do what God needs you to do for his sake in this community.

I sense that you're energized and grateful and hopeful as you engage with Christ's help in a vigorous ministry;

Maybe you're becoming the **angels** he promised he'd be bringing with him one day.

You're not angels yet. (Well, a few of you might be!)

But surely there are tendencies... there is promise!

And Christ is a **most** capable, winsome and loving leader!

So I do not doubt but that, one day, I shall see you in that light.

I have **reason** to hope so! And so do **all** of you.

Finally, as we prepare to move toward celebrating Holy Communion with our Lord, I want to circle back to the Epistle lesson paired with the gospel for this day.

I'd like us to hear once more Paul's good guidance, God's life-giving counsel for disciples like us:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;

love one another with mutual affection;

outdo one another in showing honour.

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

As those to whom Christ has extended holy hospitality, you and I have much to celebrate, much to receive and much to offer as we follow in his way.

Thanks be to God for that!

Out of His Way and In His Way
Romans 12:9-21 and Matthew 16:21-28
Towson PC 3 September 2017
Rev. William Nickels

Preface

As we prepare to listen to a portion of Matthew's gospel this morning, I want to set the scene for you... particularly any of you who were not here last Sunday when Joel focused on the preceding verses.

If you **were** here (and if you were listening!), you know that at this point in the story, Jesus and the disciples are out on the road together...

preaching and teaching and feeding and healing and **challenging** people by telling them that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near... that it was even **then upon** them.

And the people are wondering just who Jesus is?

Elijah, perhaps? Or Jeremiah? Or one of the **other** prophets?

Or, maybe John the Baptist... who'd somehow been raised from the dead and was back at work?

All kinds of **possibilities** are being floated by folks.

But, Jesus asks his disciples, *Who do **you** say that I am?*

For a time, I imagine, everything went silent as words started forming in the minds of Christ's followers.

You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, Simon Peter finally offers.

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah – for my Father himself has revealed this to you.

Now, reading from Matthew, Chapter 16, beginning at verse 21 –

From that time on, Jesus began to **show** his disciples that he must **go to Jerusalem** and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and **be killed**, and on the third day **be raised**.

And Peter **took him** aside and began to rebuke him, saying, *God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you!*

But he turned and said to Peter, *Get **behind** me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.*

Then Jesus told his disciples, *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*

For the word of God in scripture,
for the word of God among us,
for the word of God within us,
Thanks be to God.

Jesus began to show Peter and the other disciples that he must go... go to **Jerusalem**... and **undergo** great suffering... and be killed... and on the third day be raised.

He began to **show** them.

Now, to be honest, we don't know **what** that **means**, exactly.

Matthew didn't say that Jesus began to **tell** them he had to go, but rather, that he started to **show** them.

So it had to involve something **more** than speech.

I think he must have done something physical, like turning in the **direction** of Jerusalem and heading **off** that way...

maybe **pantomiming** suffering... and dying... and maybe even being resurrected.

Whatever it was, it's not spelled out.

But, whatever he **did**, we know that it moved Peter **profoundly** and **physically**.

We **know** this... because we're told that Peter **took** Jesus. He took Jesus **aside**... and rebuked him.

Now I **picture** that strong-armed fisherman jumping up in **front** of Jesus, grabbing him and then pushing him back and off the road, while declaring, *This must never happen to you!*

It's an image of a follower **asserting authority** over a leader, taking **control**... or **trying** to... a kind of a *coupe*.

But Jesus would have none of it. **Turning** away from Peter, he said, *Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me, here... standing in my way.*

Christ had somewhere to **go**, somewhere he knew he **must** go –

I must go to Jerusalem, and suffer, and be killed, and be raised.

And he would not allow anyone to hinder him as he went that way.

Peter **tried** to... putting up some **resistance**.

So, Jesus put Peter **in his place** – put him back **behind** him.

A **disciple's** proper **place**, we are shown, is **behind** Jesus.

Now, *disciple* is a word many of us would use in describing ourselves.

So, let me ask **you** now, are you **behind** Jesus?

Are you letting him lead you? Are you accepting his direction?

Are you listening **consciously** for his voice, his call, his instruction?

Are you responding to him faithfully, **following** as he goes?

Or, are **you** jumping up in front of him and blocking his way?

Are you **preventing** him from proceeding on the path he has chosen... **hindering** him from **taking you** where he wants and needs you to be?

Are you saying things like:

*Now, wait a minute, Jesus. How about letting **me** lead. I **know** where we need to go. I know where we ought to be heading.*

And, I know how to get us there without all this suffering and conflict and effort. My God, who wants that? Who needs that? Not you. Not me!

*Let **me** lead, Jesus. Let me take the **wheel**. I know a better road to steer us down than the one **you've** chosen.*

I know a smoother road, an easier way we can go than the one you're proposing - OK?

Maybe, like Peter, we **have** at times gotten up in **front** of Jesus to block the way, to **turn** him from the course he's set.

Or, maybe you're **considering** doing it **now**... in light of where he seems to be leading you, personally... or where it looks like he's taking this community of faith.

Well, I've a hunch that **our** Lord's not likely to allow **any** one to hinder him for **long**. He certainly didn't let Peter.

*Get **behind** me*, he said with that voice of **command**.

(And you can be **sure** that's **just** what Peter **did**!)

*Get **behind** me*, he calls out now to us, commanding and urging **us**, as well. *And follow... follow **me**... your **Lord**.*

Honestly, friend – are you man, woman or child **enough** to **refuse** him?

He has so **much** authority; and he is so faithful, and wise, and so full of **love** for us; and he is so trustworthy – like no one else in the whole wide world.

Why ever **would** we **refuse** him?

Well, at any rate, soon **enough**, that day, Christ **was** on his way.

He'd made it pretty **clear** that, while it was a way that would cost him dearly, it would, in the **end**, bring him **into life**...

into resurrection life... life in **all** fullness...

life in comparison to which the suffering would be as nothing.

And for everyone who followed him, it would be the **same**.

Even **as** they traveled that way **together**, in **spite** of the challenges, the hardship and the suffering they'd face, Christ's disciples would sense the **quality** of that rich, full life that was coming.

They'd sense its abundance overflowing the future, spilling back into their lives.

They would **sense** it in the **pleasure** they'd feel being on the road with Jesus...

in the **satisfaction** they'd feel while helping him work;

in the **reassurance** they'd feel whenever they shared a meal or prayed with him;

in the **consolation** that would come when they suffered along with him and for his sake;

and in the **joy** they'd feel while worshipping the Living God.

They would sense it. And **you and I** – don't we sense it, too, as we follow in our Savior's way?

Satisfaction. Reassurance. Consolation. Joy!

*In **this** world, you **have** tribulation – **indeed!** But, be of good cheer – I have **overcome** the world! Come along, and come over **with** me!*

His disciples sense... they **know as they go**... that they are following their Master **into Life... abundant Life**...

as long as they **are** following him... not ignoring him... not hindering him... but following him...

as **long** as they're **behind** him.

Are **you** behind him now? Are you **following** Christ, your leader?

Are you staying out of his way... and are you in his way?

Well, friends, here at Towson Presbyterian – it seems that Christ **is** leading you... that you're on your way **together** to something new.

Your Lord is **taking** you where **he** wants you to go... to become, along with Rob and Joel, what **he** intends for you to become... to do what God needs you to do for his sake in this community.

I sense that you're energized and grateful and hopeful as you engage with Christ's help in a vigorous ministry;

Maybe you're becoming the **angels** he promised he'd be bringing with him one day.

You're not angels yet. (Well, a few of you might be!)

But surely there are tendencies... there is promise!

And Christ is a **most** capable, winsome and loving leader!

So I do not doubt but that, one day, I shall see you in that light.

I have **reason** to hope so! And so do **all** of you.

Finally, as we prepare to move toward celebrating Holy Communion with our Lord, I want to circle back to the Epistle lesson paired with the gospel for this day.

I'd like us to hear once more Paul's good guidance, God's life-giving counsel for disciples like us:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;

love one another with mutual affection;

outdo one another in showing honour.

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

As those to whom Christ has extended holy hospitality, you and I have much to celebrate, much to receive and much to offer as we follow in his way.

Thanks be to God for that!

Out of His Way and In His Way
Romans 12:9-21 and Matthew 16:21-28
Towson PC 3 September 2017
Rev. William Nickels

Preface

As we prepare to listen to a portion of Matthew's gospel this morning, I want to set the scene for you... particularly any of you who were not here last Sunday when Joel focused on the preceding verses.

If you **were** here (and if you were listening!), you know that at this point in the story, Jesus and the disciples are out on the road together...

preaching and teaching and feeding and healing and **challenging** people by telling them that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near... that it was even **then upon** them.

And the people are wondering just who Jesus is?

Elijah, perhaps? Or Jeremiah? Or one of the **other** prophets?

Or, maybe John the Baptist... who'd somehow been raised from the dead and was back at work?

All kinds of **possibilities** are being floated by folks.

*But, Jesus asks his disciples, **Who do you say that I am?***

For a time, I imagine, everything went silent as words started forming in the minds of Christ's followers.

You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, Simon Peter finally offers.

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah – for my Father himself has revealed this to you.

Now, reading from Matthew, Chapter 16, beginning at verse 21 –

From that time on, Jesus began to **show** his disciples that he must **go to Jerusalem** and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and **be killed**, and on the third day **be raised**.

And Peter **took him** aside and began to rebuke him, saying, *God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you!*

But he turned and said to Peter, *Get **behind** me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.*

Then Jesus told his disciples, *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*

For the word of God in scripture,
for the word of God among us,
for the word of God within us,
Thanks be to God.

Jesus began to show Peter and the other disciples that he must go... go to **Jerusalem**... and **undergo** great suffering... and be killed... and on the third day be raised.

He began to **show** them.

Now, to be honest, we don't know **what** that **means**, exactly.

Matthew didn't say that Jesus began to **tell** them he had to go, but rather, that he started to **show** them.

So it had to involve something **more** than speech.

I think he must have done something physical, like turning in the **direction** of Jerusalem and heading **off** that way...

maybe **pantomiming** suffering... and dying... and maybe even being resurrected.

Whatever it was, it's not spelled out.

But, whatever he **did**, we know that it moved Peter **profoundly** and **physically**.

We **know** this... because we're told that Peter **took** Jesus. He took Jesus **aside**... and rebuked him.

Now I **picture** that strong-armed fisherman jumping up in **front** of Jesus, grabbing him and then pushing him back and off the road, while declaring, *This must never happen to you!*

It's an image of a follower **asserting authority** over a leader, taking **control**... or **trying** to... a kind of a coupe.

But Jesus would have none of it. **Turning** away from Peter, he said, *Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me, here... standing in my way.*

Christ had somewhere to **go**, somewhere he knew he **must** go –

I must go to Jerusalem, and suffer, and be killed, and be raised.

And he would not allow anyone to hinder him as he went that way.

Peter **tried** to... putting up some **resistance**.

So, Jesus put Peter **in his place** – put him back **behind** him.

A **disciple's** proper **place**, we are shown, is **behind** Jesus.

Now, *disciple* is a word many of us would use in describing ourselves.

So, let me ask **you** now, are you **behind** Jesus?

Are you letting him lead you? Are you accepting his direction?

Are you listening **consciously** for his voice, his call, his instruction?

Are you responding to him faithfully, **following** as he goes?

Or, are **you** jumping up in front of him and blocking his way?

Are you **preventing** him from proceeding on the path he has chosen... **hindering** him from **taking you** where he wants and needs you to be?

Are you saying things like:

*Now, wait a minute, Jesus. How about letting **me** lead. I **know** where we need to go. I know where we ought to be heading.*

And, I know how to get us there without all this suffering and conflict and effort. My God, who wants that? Who needs that? Not you. Not me!

*Let **me** lead, Jesus. Let me take the **wheel**. I know a better road to steer us down than the one **you've** chosen.*

I know a smoother road, an easier way we can go than the one you're proposing - OK?

Maybe, like Peter, we **have** at times gotten up in **front** of Jesus to block the way, to **turn** him from the course he's set.

Or, maybe you're **considering** doing it **now**... in light of where he seems to be leading you, personally... or where it looks like he's taking this community of faith.

Well, I've a hunch that **our** Lord's not likely to allow **any** one to hinder him for **long**. He certainly didn't let Peter.

*Get **behind** me*, he said with that voice of **command**.

(And you can be **sure** that's **just** what Peter **did**!)

*Get **behind** me*, he calls out now to us, commanding and urging **us**, as well. *And follow... follow **me**... your **Lord**.*

Honestly, friend – are you man, woman or child **enough** to **refuse** him?

He has so **much** authority; and he is so faithful, and wise, and so full of **love** for us; and he is so trustworthy – like no one else in the whole wide world.

Why ever **would** we **refuse** him?

Well, at any rate, soon **enough**, that day, Christ **was** on his way.

He'd made it pretty **clear** that, while it was a way that would cost him dearly, it would, in the **end**, bring him **into life**...

into resurrection life... life in **all** fullness...

life in comparison to which the suffering would be as nothing.

And for everyone who followed him, it would be the **same**.

Even **as** they traveled that way **together**, in **spite** of the challenges, the hardship and the suffering they'd face, Christ's disciples would sense the **quality** of that rich, full life that was coming.

They'd sense its abundance overflowing the future, spilling back into their lives.

They would **sense** it in the **pleasure** they'd feel being on the road with Jesus...

in the **satisfaction** they'd feel while helping him work;

in the **reassurance** they'd feel whenever they shared a meal or prayed with him;

in the **consolation** that would come when they suffered along with him and for his sake;

and in the **joy** they'd feel while worshipping the Living God.

They would sense it. And **you and I** – don't we sense it, too, as we follow in our Savior's way?

Satisfaction. Reassurance. Consolation. Joy!

*In **this** world, you **have** tribulation – **indeed!** But, be of good cheer – I have **overcome** the world! Come along, and come over **with** me!*

His disciples sense... they **know as they go**... that they are following their Master **into Life... abundant Life**...

as long as they **are** following him... not ignoring him... not hindering him... but following him...

as **long** as they're **behind** him.

Are **you** behind him now? Are you **following** Christ, your leader?

Are you staying out of his way... and are you in his way?

Well, friends, here at Towson Presbyterian – it seems that Christ **is** leading you... that you're on your way **together** to something new.

Your Lord is **taking** you where **he** wants you to go... to become, along with Rob and Joel, what **he** intends for you to become... to do what God needs you to do for his sake in this community.

I sense that you're energized and grateful and hopeful as you engage with Christ's help in a vigorous ministry;

Maybe you're becoming the **angels** he promised he'd be bringing with him one day.

You're not angels yet. (Well, a few of you might be!)

But surely there are tendencies... there is promise!

And Christ is a **most** capable, winsome and loving leader!

So I do not doubt but that, one day, I shall see you in that light.

I have **reason** to hope so! And so do **all** of you.

Finally, as we prepare to move toward celebrating Holy Communion with our Lord, I want to circle back to the Epistle lesson paired with the gospel for this day.

I'd like us to hear once more Paul's good guidance, God's life-giving counsel for disciples like us:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;

love one another with mutual affection;

outdo one another in showing honour.

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

As those to whom Christ has extended holy hospitality, you and I have much to celebrate, much to receive and much to offer as we follow in his way.

Thanks be to God for that!

Out of His Way and In His Way
Romans 12:9-21 and Matthew 16:21-28
Towson PC 3 September 2017
Rev. William Nickels

Preface

As we prepare to listen to a portion of Matthew's gospel this morning, I want to set the scene for you... particularly any of you who were not here last Sunday when Joel focused on the preceding verses.

If you **were** here (and if you were listening!), you know that at this point in the story, Jesus and the disciples are out on the road together...

preaching and teaching and feeding and healing and **challenging** people by telling them that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near... that it was even **then upon** them.

And the people are wondering just who Jesus is?

Elijah, perhaps? Or Jeremiah? Or one of the **other** prophets?

Or, maybe John the Baptist... who'd somehow been raised from the dead and was back at work?

All kinds of **possibilities** are being floated by folks.

*But, Jesus asks his disciples, **Who do you say that I am?***

For a time, I imagine, everything went silent as words started forming in the minds of Christ's followers.

You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, Simon Peter finally offers.

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah – for my Father himself has revealed this to you.

Now, reading from Matthew, Chapter 16, beginning at verse 21 –

From that time on, Jesus began to **show** his disciples that he must **go to Jerusalem** and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and **be killed**, and on the third day **be raised**.

And Peter **took him** aside and began to rebuke him, saying, *God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you!*

But he turned and said to Peter, *Get **behind** me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.*

Then Jesus told his disciples, *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*

For the word of God in scripture,
for the word of God among us,
for the word of God within us,
Thanks be to God.

Jesus began to show Peter and the other disciples that he must go... go to **Jerusalem**... and **undergo** great suffering... and be killed... and on the third day be raised.

He began to **show** them.

Now, to be honest, we don't know **what** that **means**, exactly.

Matthew didn't say that Jesus began to **tell** them he had to go, but rather, that he started to **show** them.

So it had to involve something **more** than speech.

I think he must have done something physical, like turning in the **direction** of Jerusalem and heading **off** that way...

maybe **pantomiming** suffering... and dying... and maybe even being resurrected.

Whatever it was, it's not spelled out.

But, whatever he **did**, we know that it moved Peter **profoundly** and **physically**.

We **know** this... because we're told that Peter **took** Jesus. He took Jesus **aside**... and rebuked him.

Now I **picture** that strong-armed fisherman jumping up in **front** of Jesus, grabbing him and then pushing him back and off the road, while declaring, *This must never happen to you!*

It's an image of a follower **asserting authority** over a leader, taking **control**... or **trying** to... a kind of a *coupe*.

But Jesus would have none of it. **Turning** away from Peter, he said, *Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me, here... standing in my way.*

Christ had somewhere to **go**, somewhere he knew he **must** go –

I must go to Jerusalem, and suffer, and be killed, and be raised.

And he would not allow anyone to hinder him as he went that way.

Peter **tried** to... putting up some **resistance**.

So, Jesus put Peter **in his place** – put him back **behind** him.

A **disciple's** proper **place**, we are shown, is **behind** Jesus.

Now, *disciple* is a word many of us would use in describing ourselves.

So, let me ask **you** now, are you **behind** Jesus?

Are you letting him lead you? Are you accepting his direction?

Are you listening **consciously** for his voice, his call, his instruction?

Are you responding to him faithfully, **following** as he goes?

Or, are **you** jumping up in front of him and blocking his way?

Are you **preventing** him from proceeding on the path he has chosen... **hindering** him from **taking you** where he wants and needs you to be?

Are you saying things like:

*Now, wait a minute, Jesus. How about letting **me** lead. I **know** where we need to go. I know where we ought to be heading.*

And, I know how to get us there without all this suffering and conflict and effort. My God, who wants that? Who needs that? Not you. Not me!

*Let **me** lead, Jesus. Let me take the **wheel**. I know a better road to steer us down than the one **you've** chosen.*

I know a smoother road, an easier way we can go than the one you're proposing - OK?

Maybe, like Peter, we **have** at times gotten up in **front** of Jesus to block the way, to **turn** him from the course he's set.

Or, maybe you're **considering** doing it **now**... in light of where he seems to be leading you, personally... or where it looks like he's taking this community of faith.

Well, I've a hunch that **our** Lord's not likely to allow **any** one to hinder him for **long**. He certainly didn't let Peter.

*Get **behind** me*, he said with that voice of **command**.

(And you can be **sure** that's **just** what Peter **did**!)

*Get **behind** me*, he calls out now to us, commanding and urging **us**, as well. *And follow... follow **me**... your **Lord**.*

Honestly, friend – are you man, woman or child **enough** to **refuse** him?

He has so **much** authority; and he is so faithful, and wise, and so full of **love** for us; and he is so trustworthy – like no one else in the whole wide world.

Why ever **would** we **refuse** him?

Well, at any rate, soon **enough**, that day, Christ **was** on his way.

He'd made it pretty **clear** that, while it was a way that would cost him dearly, it would, in the **end**, bring him **into life**...

into resurrection life... life in **all** fullness...

life in comparison to which the suffering would be as nothing.

And for everyone who followed him, it would be the **same**.

Even **as** they traveled that way **together**, in **spite** of the challenges, the hardship and the suffering they'd face, Christ's disciples would sense the **quality** of that rich, full life that was coming.

They'd sense its abundance overflowing the future, spilling back into their lives.

They would **sense** it in the **pleasure** they'd feel being on the road with Jesus...

in the **satisfaction** they'd feel while helping him work;

in the **reassurance** they'd feel whenever they shared a meal or prayed with him;

in the **consolation** that would come when they suffered along with him and for his sake;

and in the **joy** they'd feel while worshipping the Living God.

They would sense it. And **you and I** – don't we sense it, too, as we follow in our Savior's way?

Satisfaction. Reassurance. Consolation. Joy!

*In **this** world, you **have** tribulation – **indeed!** But, be of good cheer – I have **overcome** the world! Come along, and come over **with** me!*

His disciples sense... they **know as they go**... that they are following their Master **into Life... abundant Life**...

as long as they **are** following him... not ignoring him... not hindering him... but following him...

as **long** as they're **behind** him.

Are **you** behind him now? Are you **following** Christ, your leader?

Are you staying out of his way... and are you in his way?

Well, friends, here at Towson Presbyterian – it seems that Christ **is** leading you... that you're on your way **together** to something new.

Your Lord is **taking** you where **he** wants you to go... to become, along with Rob and Joel, what **he** intends for you to become... to do what God needs you to do for his sake in this community.

I sense that you're energized and grateful and hopeful as you engage with Christ's help in a vigorous ministry;

Maybe you're becoming the **angels** he promised he'd be bringing with him one day.

You're not angels yet. (Well, a few of you might be!)

But surely there are tendencies... there is promise!

And Christ is a **most** capable, winsome and loving leader!

So I do not doubt but that, one day, I shall see you in that light.

I have **reason** to hope so! And so do **all** of you.

Finally, as we prepare to move toward celebrating Holy Communion with our Lord, I want to circle back to the Epistle lesson paired with the gospel for this day.

I'd like us to hear once more Paul's good guidance, God's life-giving counsel for disciples like us:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;

love one another with mutual affection;

outdo one another in showing honour.

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

As those to whom Christ has extended holy hospitality, you and I have much to celebrate, much to receive and much to offer as we follow in his way.

Thanks be to God for that!

Out of His Way and In His Way
Romans 12:9-21 and Matthew 16:21-28
Towson PC 3 September 2017
Rev. William Nickels

Preface

As we prepare to listen to a portion of Matthew's gospel this morning, I want to set the scene for you... particularly any of you who were not here last Sunday when Joel focused on the preceding verses.

If you **were** here (and if you were listening!), you know that at this point in the story, Jesus and the disciples are out on the road together...

preaching and teaching and feeding and healing and **challenging** people by telling them that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near... that it was even **then upon** them.

And the people are wondering just who Jesus is?

Elijah, perhaps? Or Jeremiah? Or one of the **other** prophets?

Or, maybe John the Baptist... who'd somehow been raised from the dead and was back at work?

All kinds of **possibilities** are being floated by folks.

*But, Jesus asks his disciples, Who do **you** say that I am?*

For a time, I imagine, everything went silent as words started forming in the minds of Christ's followers.

You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, Simon Peter finally offers.

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah – for my Father himself has revealed this to you.

Now, reading from Matthew, Chapter 16, beginning at verse 21 –

From that time on, Jesus began to **show** his disciples that he must **go to Jerusalem** and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and **be killed**, and on the third day **be raised**.

And Peter **took him** aside and began to rebuke him, saying, *God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you!*

But he turned and said to Peter, *Get **behind** me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.*

Then Jesus told his disciples, *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*

For the word of God in scripture,
for the word of God among us,
for the word of God within us,
Thanks be to God.

Jesus began to show Peter and the other disciples that he must go... go to **Jerusalem**... and **undergo** great suffering... and be killed... and on the third day be raised.

He began to **show** them.

Now, to be honest, we don't know **what** that **means**, exactly.

Matthew didn't say that Jesus began to **tell** them he had to go, but rather, that he started to **show** them.

So it had to involve something **more** than speech.

I think he must have done something physical, like turning in the **direction** of Jerusalem and heading **off** that way...

maybe **pantomiming** suffering... and dying... and maybe even being resurrected.

Whatever it was, it's not spelled out.

But, whatever he **did**, we know that it moved Peter **profoundly** and **physically**.

We **know** this... because we're told that Peter **took** Jesus. He took Jesus **aside**... and rebuked him.

Now I **picture** that strong-armed fisherman jumping up in **front** of Jesus, grabbing him and then pushing him back and off the road, while declaring, *This must never happen to you!*

It's an image of a follower **asserting authority** over a leader, taking **control**... or **trying** to... a kind of a *coupe*.

But Jesus would have none of it. **Turning** away from Peter, he said, *Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me, here... standing in my way.*

Christ had somewhere to **go**, somewhere he knew he **must** go –

I must go to Jerusalem, and suffer, and be killed, and be raised.

And he would not allow anyone to hinder him as he went that way.

Peter **tried** to... putting up some **resistance**.

So, Jesus put Peter **in his place** – put him back **behind** him.

A **disciple's** proper **place**, we are shown, is **behind** Jesus.

Now, *disciple* is a word many of us would use in describing ourselves.

So, let me ask **you** now, are you **behind** Jesus?

Are you letting him lead you? Are you accepting his direction?

Are you listening **consciously** for his voice, his call, his instruction?

Are you responding to him faithfully, **following** as he goes?

Or, are **you** jumping up in front of him and blocking his way?

Are you **preventing** him from proceeding on the path he has chosen... **hindering** him from **taking you** where he wants and needs you to be?

Are you saying things like:

*Now, wait a minute, Jesus. How about letting **me** lead. I **know** where we need to go. I know where we ought to be heading.*

And, I know how to get us there without all this suffering and conflict and effort. My God, who wants that? Who needs that? Not you. Not me!

*Let **me** lead, Jesus. Let me take the **wheel**. I know a better road to steer us down than the one **you've** chosen.*

I know a smoother road, an easier way we can go than the one you're proposing - OK?

Maybe, like Peter, we **have** at times gotten up in **front** of Jesus to block the way, to **turn** him from the course he's set.

Or, maybe you're **considering** doing it **now**... in light of where he seems to be leading you, personally... or where it looks like he's taking this community of faith.

Well, I've a hunch that **our** Lord's not likely to allow **any** one to hinder him for **long**. He certainly didn't let Peter.

*Get **behind** me*, he said with that voice of **command**.

(And you can be **sure** that's **just** what Peter **did**!)

*Get **behind** me*, he calls out now to us, commanding and urging **us**, as well. *And follow... follow **me**... your **Lord**.*

Honestly, friend – are you man, woman or child **enough** to **refuse** him?

He has so **much** authority; and he is so faithful, and wise, and so full of **love** for us; and he is so trustworthy – like no one else in the whole wide world.

Why ever **would** we **refuse** him?

Well, at any rate, soon **enough**, that day, Christ **was** on his way.

He'd made it pretty **clear** that, while it was a way that would cost him dearly, it would, in the **end**, bring him **into life**...

into resurrection life... life in **all** fullness...

life in comparison to which the suffering would be as nothing.

And for everyone who followed him, it would be the **same**.

Even **as** they traveled that way **together**, in **spite** of the challenges, the hardship and the suffering they'd face, Christ's disciples would sense the **quality** of that rich, full life that was coming.

They'd sense its abundance overflowing the future, spilling back into their lives.

They would **sense** it in the **pleasure** they'd feel being on the road with Jesus...

in the **satisfaction** they'd feel while helping him work;

in the **reassurance** they'd feel whenever they shared a meal or prayed with him;

in the **consolation** that would come when they suffered along with him and for his sake;

and in the **joy** they'd feel while worshipping the Living God.

They would sense it. And **you and I** – don't we sense it, too, as we follow in our Savior's way?

Satisfaction. Reassurance. Consolation. Joy!

*In **this** world, you **have** tribulation – **indeed!** But, be of good cheer – I have **overcome** the world! Come along, and come over **with** me!*

His disciples sense... they **know as they go**... that they are following their Master **into Life... abundant Life**...

as long as they **are** following him... not ignoring him... not hindering him... but following him...

as **long** as they're **behind** him.

Are **you** behind him now? Are you **following** Christ, your leader?

Are you staying out of his way... and are you in his way?

Well, friends, here at Towson Presbyterian – it seems that Christ **is** leading you... that you're on your way **together** to something new.

Your Lord is **taking** you where **he** wants you to go... to become, along with Rob and Joel, what **he** intends for you to become... to do what God needs you to do for his sake in this community.

I sense that you're energized and grateful and hopeful as you engage with Christ's help in a vigorous ministry;

Maybe you're becoming the **angels** he promised he'd be bringing with him one day.

You're not angels yet. (Well, a few of you might be!)

But surely there are tendencies... there is promise!

And Christ is a **most** capable, winsome and loving leader!

So I do not doubt but that, one day, I shall see you in that light.

I have **reason** to hope so! And so do **all** of you.

Finally, as we prepare to move toward celebrating Holy Communion with our Lord, I want to circle back to the Epistle lesson paired with the gospel for this day.

I'd like us to hear once more Paul's good guidance, God's life-giving counsel for disciples like us:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;

love one another with mutual affection;

outdo one another in showing honour.

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

As those to whom Christ has extended holy hospitality, you and I have much to celebrate, much to receive and much to offer as we follow in his way.

Thanks be to God for that!

Out of His Way and In His Way
Romans 12:9-21 and Matthew 16:21-28
Towson PC 3 September 2017
Rev. William Nickels

Preface

As we prepare to listen to a portion of Matthew's gospel this morning, I want to set the scene for you... particularly any of you who were not here last Sunday when Joel focused on the preceding verses.

If you **were** here (and if you were listening!), you know that at this point in the story, Jesus and the disciples are out on the road together...

preaching and teaching and feeding and healing and **challenging** people by telling them that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near... that it was even **then upon** them.

And the people are wondering just who Jesus is?

Elijah, perhaps? Or Jeremiah? Or one of the **other** prophets?

Or, maybe John the Baptist... who'd somehow been raised from the dead and was back at work?

All kinds of **possibilities** are being floated by folks.

*But, Jesus asks his disciples, **Who do you say that I am?***

For a time, I imagine, everything went silent as words started forming in the minds of Christ's followers.

You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, Simon Peter finally offers.

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah – for my Father himself has revealed this to you.

Now, reading from Matthew, Chapter 16, beginning at verse 21 –

From that time on, Jesus began to **show** his disciples that he must **go to Jerusalem** and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and **be killed**, and on the third day **be raised**.

And Peter **took him** aside and began to rebuke him, saying, *God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you!*

But he turned and said to Peter, *Get **behind** me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.*

Then Jesus told his disciples, *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*

For the word of God in scripture,
for the word of God among us,
for the word of God within us,
Thanks be to God.

Jesus began to show Peter and the other disciples that he must go... go to **Jerusalem**... and **undergo** great suffering... and be killed... and on the third day be raised.

He began to **show** them.

Now, to be honest, we don't know **what** that **means**, exactly.

Matthew didn't say that Jesus began to **tell** them he had to go, but rather, that he started to **show** them.

So it had to involve something **more** than speech.

I think he must have done something physical, like turning in the **direction** of Jerusalem and heading **off** that way...

maybe **pantomiming** suffering... and dying... and maybe even being resurrected.

Whatever it was, it's not spelled out.

But, whatever he **did**, we know that it moved Peter **profoundly** and **physically**.

We **know** this... because we're told that Peter **took** Jesus. He took Jesus **aside**... and rebuked him.

Now I **picture** that strong-armed fisherman jumping up in **front** of Jesus, grabbing him and then pushing him back and off the road, while declaring, *This must never happen to you!*

It's an image of a follower **asserting authority** over a leader, taking **control**... or **trying** to... a kind of a *coupe*.

But Jesus would have none of it. **Turning** away from Peter, he said, *Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me, here... standing in my way.*

Christ had somewhere to **go**, somewhere he knew he **must** go –

I must go to Jerusalem, and suffer, and be killed, and be raised.

And he would not allow anyone to hinder him as he went that way.

Peter **tried** to... putting up some **resistance**.

So, Jesus put Peter **in his place** – put him back **behind** him.

A **disciple's** proper **place**, we are shown, is **behind** Jesus.

Now, *disciple* is a word many of us would use in describing ourselves.

So, let me ask **you** now, are you **behind** Jesus?

Are you letting him lead you? Are you accepting his direction?

Are you listening **consciously** for his voice, his call, his instruction?

Are you responding to him faithfully, **following** as he goes?

Or, are **you** jumping up in front of him and blocking his way?

Are you **preventing** him from proceeding on the path he has chosen... **hindering** him from **taking you** where he wants and needs you to be?

Are you saying things like:

*Now, wait a minute, Jesus. How about letting **me** lead. I **know** where we need to go. I know where we ought to be heading.*

And, I know how to get us there without all this suffering and conflict and effort. My God, who wants that? Who needs that? Not you. Not me!

*Let **me** lead, Jesus. Let me take the **wheel**. I know a better road to steer us down than the one **you've** chosen.*

I know a smoother road, an easier way we can go than the one you're proposing - OK?

Maybe, like Peter, we **have** at times gotten up in **front** of Jesus to block the way, to **turn** him from the course he's set.

Or, maybe you're **considering** doing it **now**... in light of where he seems to be leading you, personally... or where it looks like he's taking this community of faith.

Well, I've a hunch that **our** Lord's not likely to allow **any** one to hinder him for **long**. He certainly didn't let Peter.

*Get **behind** me*, he said with that voice of **command**.

(And you can be **sure** that's **just** what Peter **did**!)

*Get **behind** me*, he calls out now to us, commanding and urging **us**, as well. *And follow... follow **me**... your **Lord**.*

Honestly, friend – are you man, woman or child **enough** to **refuse** him?

He has so **much** authority; and he is so faithful, and wise, and so full of **love** for us; and he is so trustworthy – like no one else in the whole wide world.

Why ever **would** we **refuse** him?

Well, at any rate, soon **enough**, that day, Christ **was** on his way.

He'd made it pretty **clear** that, while it was a way that would cost him dearly, it would, in the **end**, bring him **into life**...

into resurrection life... life in **all** fullness...

life in comparison to which the suffering would be as nothing.

And for everyone who followed him, it would be the **same**.

Even **as** they traveled that way **together**, in **spite** of the challenges, the hardship and the suffering they'd face, Christ's disciples would sense the **quality** of that rich, full life that was coming.

They'd sense its abundance overflowing the future, spilling back into their lives.

They would **sense** it in the **pleasure** they'd feel being on the road with Jesus...

in the **satisfaction** they'd feel while helping him work;

in the **reassurance** they'd feel whenever they shared a meal or prayed with him;

in the **consolation** that would come when they suffered along with him and for his sake;

and in the **joy** they'd feel while worshipping the Living God.

They would sense it. And **you and I** – don't we sense it, too, as we follow in our Savior's way?

Satisfaction. Reassurance. Consolation. Joy!

*In **this** world, you **have** tribulation – **indeed!** But, be of good cheer – I have **overcome** the world! Come along, and come over **with** me!*

His disciples sense... they **know as they go**... that they are following their Master **into Life... abundant Life**...

as long as they **are** following him... not ignoring him... not hindering him... but following him...

as **long** as they're **behind** him.

Are **you** behind him now? Are you **following** Christ, your leader?

Are you staying out of his way... and are you in his way?

Well, friends, here at Towson Presbyterian – it seems that Christ **is** leading you... that you're on your way **together** to something new.

Your Lord is **taking** you where **he** wants you to go... to become, along with Rob and Joel, what **he** intends for you to become... to do what God needs you to do for his sake in this community.

I sense that you're energized and grateful and hopeful as you engage with Christ's help in a vigorous ministry;

Maybe you're becoming the **angels** he promised he'd be bringing with him one day.

You're not angels yet. (Well, a few of you might be!)

But surely there are tendencies... there is promise!

And Christ is a **most** capable, winsome and loving leader!

So I do not doubt but that, one day, I shall see you in that light.

I have **reason** to hope so! And so do **all** of you.

Finally, as we prepare to move toward celebrating Holy Communion with our Lord, I want to circle back to the Epistle lesson paired with the gospel for this day.

I'd like us to hear once more Paul's good guidance, God's life-giving counsel for disciples like us:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;

love one another with mutual affection;

outdo one another in showing honour.

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

As those to whom Christ has extended holy hospitality, you and I have much to celebrate, much to receive and much to offer as we follow in his way.

Thanks be to God for that!

Out of His Way and In His Way
Romans 12:9-21 and Matthew 16:21-28
Towson PC 3 September 2017
Rev. William Nickels

Preface

As we prepare to listen to a portion of Matthew's gospel this morning, I want to set the scene for you... particularly any of you who were not here last Sunday when Joel focused on the preceding verses.

If you **were** here (and if you were listening!), you know that at this point in the story, Jesus and the disciples are out on the road together...

preaching and teaching and feeding and healing and **challenging** people by telling them that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near... that it was even **then upon** them.

And the people are wondering just who Jesus is?

Elijah, perhaps? Or Jeremiah? Or one of the **other** prophets?

Or, maybe John the Baptist... who'd somehow been raised from the dead and was back at work?

All kinds of **possibilities** are being floated by folks.

*But, Jesus asks his disciples, Who do **you** say that I am?*

For a time, I imagine, everything went silent as words started forming in the minds of Christ's followers.

You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, Simon Peter finally offers.

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah – for my Father himself has revealed this to you.

Now, reading from Matthew, Chapter 16, beginning at verse 21 –

From that time on, Jesus began to **show** his disciples that he must **go to Jerusalem** and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and **be killed**, and on the third day **be raised**.

And Peter **took him** aside and began to rebuke him, saying, *God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you!*

But he turned and said to Peter, *Get **behind** me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.*

Then Jesus told his disciples, *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*

For the word of God in scripture,
for the word of God among us,
for the word of God within us,
Thanks be to God.

Jesus began to show Peter and the other disciples that he must go... go to **Jerusalem**... and **undergo** great suffering... and be killed... and on the third day be raised.

He began to **show** them.

Now, to be honest, we don't know **what** that **means**, exactly.

Matthew didn't say that Jesus began to **tell** them he had to go, but rather, that he started to **show** them.

So it had to involve something **more** than speech.

I think he must have done something physical, like turning in the **direction** of Jerusalem and heading **off** that way...

maybe **pantomiming** suffering... and dying... and maybe even being resurrected.

Whatever it was, it's not spelled out.

But, whatever he **did**, we know that it moved Peter **profoundly** and **physically**.

We **know** this... because we're told that Peter **took** Jesus. He took Jesus **aside**... and rebuked him.

Now I **picture** that strong-armed fisherman jumping up in **front** of Jesus, grabbing him and then pushing him back and off the road, while declaring, *This must never happen to you!*

It's an image of a follower **asserting authority** over a leader, taking **control**... or **trying** to... a kind of a coupe.

But Jesus would have none of it. **Turning** away from Peter, he said, *Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me, here... standing in my way.*

Christ had somewhere to **go**, somewhere he knew he **must** go –

I must go to Jerusalem, and suffer, and be killed, and be raised.

And he would not allow anyone to hinder him as he went that way.

Peter **tried** to... putting up some **resistance**.

So, Jesus put Peter **in his place** – put him back **behind** him.

A **disciple's** proper **place**, we are shown, is **behind** Jesus.

Now, *disciple* is a word many of us would use in describing ourselves.

So, let me ask **you** now, are you **behind** Jesus?

Are you letting him lead you? Are you accepting his direction?

Are you listening **consciously** for his voice, his call, his instruction?

Are you responding to him faithfully, **following** as he goes?

Or, are **you** jumping up in front of him and blocking his way?

Are you **preventing** him from proceeding on the path he has chosen... **hindering** him from **taking you** where he wants and needs you to be?

Are you saying things like:

*Now, wait a minute, Jesus. How about letting **me** lead. I **know** where we need to go. I know where we ought to be heading.*

And, I know how to get us there without all this suffering and conflict and effort. My God, who wants that? Who needs that? Not you. Not me!

*Let **me** lead, Jesus. Let me take the **wheel**. I know a better road to steer us down than the one **you've** chosen.*

I know a smoother road, an easier way we can go than the one you're proposing - OK?

Maybe, like Peter, we **have** at times gotten up in **front** of Jesus to block the way, to **turn** him from the course he's set.

Or, maybe you're **considering** doing it **now**... in light of where he seems to be leading you, personally... or where it looks like he's taking this community of faith.

Well, I've a hunch that **our** Lord's not likely to allow **any** one to hinder him for **long**. He certainly didn't let Peter.

*Get **behind** me*, he said with that voice of **command**.

(And you can be **sure** that's **just** what Peter **did**!)

*Get **behind** me*, he calls out now to us, commanding and urging **us**, as well. *And follow... follow **me**... your **Lord**.*

Honestly, friend – are you man, woman or child **enough** to **refuse** him?

He has so **much** authority; and he is so faithful, and wise, and so full of **love** for us; and he is so trustworthy – like no one else in the whole wide world.

Why ever **would** we **refuse** him?

Well, at any rate, soon **enough**, that day, Christ **was** on his way.

He'd made it pretty **clear** that, while it was a way that would cost him dearly, it would, in the **end**, bring him **into life**...

into resurrection life... life in **all** fullness...

life in comparison to which the suffering would be as nothing.

And for everyone who followed him, it would be the **same**.

Even **as** they traveled that way **together**, in **spite** of the challenges, the hardship and the suffering they'd face, Christ's disciples would sense the **quality** of that rich, full life that was coming.

They'd sense its abundance overflowing the future, spilling back into their lives.

They would **sense** it in the **pleasure** they'd feel being on the road with Jesus...

in the **satisfaction** they'd feel while helping him work;

in the **reassurance** they'd feel whenever they shared a meal or prayed with him;

in the **consolation** that would come when they suffered along with him and for his sake;

and in the **joy** they'd feel while worshipping the Living God.

They would sense it. And **you and I** – don't we sense it, too, as we follow in our Savior's way?

Satisfaction. Reassurance. Consolation. Joy!

*In **this** world, you **have** tribulation – **indeed!** But, be of good cheer – I have **overcome** the world! Come along, and come over **with** me!*

His disciples sense... they **know as they go**... that they are following their Master **into Life... abundant Life**...

as long as they **are** following him... not ignoring him... not hindering him... but following him...

as **long** as they're **behind** him.

Are **you** behind him now? Are you **following** Christ, your leader?

Are you staying out of his way... and are you in his way?

Well, friends, here at Towson Presbyterian – it seems that Christ **is** leading you... that you're on your way **together** to something new.

Your Lord is **taking** you where **he** wants you to go... to become, along with Rob and Joel, what **he** intends for you to become... to do what God needs you to do for his sake in this community.

I sense that you're energized and grateful and hopeful as you engage with Christ's help in a vigorous ministry;

Maybe you're becoming the **angels** he promised he'd be bringing with him one day.

You're not angels yet. (Well, a few of you might be!)

But surely there are tendencies... there is promise!

And Christ is a **most** capable, winsome and loving leader!

So I do not doubt but that, one day, I shall see you in that light.

I have **reason** to hope so! And so do **all** of you.

Finally, as we prepare to move toward celebrating Holy Communion with our Lord, I want to circle back to the Epistle lesson paired with the gospel for this day.

I'd like us to hear once more Paul's good guidance, God's life-giving counsel for disciples like us:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;

love one another with mutual affection;

outdo one another in showing honour.

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

As those to whom Christ has extended holy hospitality, you and I have much to celebrate, much to receive and much to offer as we follow in his way.

Thanks be to God for that!

Out of His Way and In His Way
Romans 12:9-21 and Matthew 16:21-28
Towson PC 3 September 2017
Rev. William Nickels

Preface

As we prepare to listen to a portion of Matthew's gospel this morning, I want to set the scene for you... particularly any of you who were not here last Sunday when Joel focused on the preceding verses.

If you **were** here (and if you were listening!), you know that at this point in the story, Jesus and the disciples are out on the road together...

preaching and teaching and feeding and healing and **challenging** people by telling them that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near... that it was even **then upon** them.

And the people are wondering just who Jesus is?

Elijah, perhaps? Or Jeremiah? Or one of the **other** prophets?

Or, maybe John the Baptist... who'd somehow been raised from the dead and was back at work?

All kinds of **possibilities** are being floated by folks.

*But, Jesus asks his disciples, **Who do you say that I am?***

For a time, I imagine, everything went silent as words started forming in the minds of Christ's followers.

You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, Simon Peter finally offers.

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah – for my Father himself has revealed this to you.

Now, reading from Matthew, Chapter 16, beginning at verse 21 –

From that time on, Jesus began to **show** his disciples that he must **go to Jerusalem** and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and **be killed**, and on the third day **be raised**.

And Peter **took him** aside and began to rebuke him, saying, *God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you!*

But he turned and said to Peter, *Get **behind** me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.*

Then Jesus told his disciples, *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*

For the word of God in scripture,
for the word of God among us,
for the word of God within us,
Thanks be to God.

Jesus began to show Peter and the other disciples that he must go... go to **Jerusalem**... and **undergo** great suffering... and be killed... and on the third day be raised.

He began to **show** them.

Now, to be honest, we don't know **what** that **means**, exactly.

Matthew didn't say that Jesus began to **tell** them he had to go, but rather, that he started to **show** them.

So it had to involve something **more** than speech.

I think he must have done something physical, like turning in the **direction** of Jerusalem and heading **off** that way...

maybe **pantomiming** suffering... and dying... and maybe even being resurrected.

Whatever it was, it's not spelled out.

But, whatever he **did**, we know that it moved Peter **profoundly** and **physically**.

We **know** this... because we're told that Peter **took** Jesus. He took Jesus **aside**... and rebuked him.

Now I **picture** that strong-armed fisherman jumping up in **front** of Jesus, grabbing him and then pushing him back and off the road, while declaring, *This must never happen to you!*

It's an image of a follower **asserting authority** over a leader, taking **control**... or **trying** to... a kind of a *coupe*.

But Jesus would have none of it. **Turning** away from Peter, he said, *Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me, here... standing in my way.*

Christ had somewhere to **go**, somewhere he knew he **must** go –

I must go to Jerusalem, and suffer, and be killed, and be raised.

And he would not allow anyone to hinder him as he went that way.

Peter **tried** to... putting up some **resistance**.

So, Jesus put Peter **in his place** – put him back **behind** him.

A **disciple's** proper **place**, we are shown, is **behind** Jesus.

Now, *disciple* is a word many of us would use in describing ourselves.

So, let me ask **you** now, are you **behind** Jesus?

Are you letting him lead you? Are you accepting his direction?

Are you listening **consciously** for his voice, his call, his instruction?

Are you responding to him faithfully, **following** as he goes?

Or, are **you** jumping up in front of him and blocking his way?

Are you **preventing** him from proceeding on the path he has chosen... **hindering** him from **taking you** where he wants and needs you to be?

Are you saying things like:

*Now, wait a minute, Jesus. How about letting **me** lead. I **know** where we need to go. I know where we ought to be heading.*

And, I know how to get us there without all this suffering and conflict and effort. My God, who wants that? Who needs that? Not you. Not me!

*Let **me** lead, Jesus. Let me take the **wheel**. I know a better road to steer us down than the one **you've** chosen.*

I know a smoother road, an easier way we can go than the one you're proposing - OK?

Maybe, like Peter, we **have** at times gotten up in **front** of Jesus to block the way, to **turn** him from the course he's set.

Or, maybe you're **considering** doing it **now**... in light of where he seems to be leading you, personally... or where it looks like he's taking this community of faith.

Well, I've a hunch that **our** Lord's not likely to allow **any** one to hinder him for **long**. He certainly didn't let Peter.

*Get **behind** me*, he said with that voice of **command**.

(And you can be **sure** that's **just** what Peter **did**!)

*Get **behind** me*, he calls out now to us, commanding and urging **us**, as well. *And follow... follow **me**... your **Lord**.*

Honestly, friend – are you man, woman or child **enough** to **refuse** him?

He has so **much** authority; and he is so faithful, and wise, and so full of **love** for us; and he is so trustworthy – like no one else in the whole wide world.

Why ever **would** we **refuse** him?

Well, at any rate, soon **enough**, that day, Christ **was** on his way.

He'd made it pretty **clear** that, while it was a way that would cost him dearly, it would, in the **end**, bring him **into life**...

into resurrection life... life in **all** fullness...

life in comparison to which the suffering would be as nothing.

And for everyone who followed him, it would be the **same**.

Even **as** they traveled that way **together**, in **spite** of the challenges, the hardship and the suffering they'd face, Christ's disciples would sense the **quality** of that rich, full life that was coming.

They'd sense its abundance overflowing the future, spilling back into their lives.

They would **sense** it in the **pleasure** they'd feel being on the road with Jesus...

in the **satisfaction** they'd feel while helping him work;

in the **reassurance** they'd feel whenever they shared a meal or prayed with him;

in the **consolation** that would come when they suffered along with him and for his sake;

and in the **joy** they'd feel while worshipping the Living God.

They would sense it. And **you and I** – don't we sense it, too, as we follow in our Savior's way?

Satisfaction. Reassurance. Consolation. Joy!

*In **this** world, you **have** tribulation – **indeed!** But, be of good cheer – I have **overcome** the world! Come along, and come over **with** me!*

His disciples sense... they **know as they go**... that they are following their Master **into Life... abundant Life**...

as long as they **are** following him... not ignoring him... not hindering him... but following him...

as **long** as they're **behind** him.

Are **you** behind him now? Are you **following** Christ, your leader?

Are you staying out of his way... and are you in his way?

Well, friends, here at Towson Presbyterian – it seems that Christ **is** leading you... that you're on your way **together** to something new.

Your Lord is **taking** you where **he** wants you to go... to become, along with Rob and Joel, what **he** intends for you to become... to do what God needs you to do for his sake in this community.

I sense that you're energized and grateful and hopeful as you engage with Christ's help in a vigorous ministry;

Maybe you're becoming the **angels** he promised he'd be bringing with him one day.

You're not angels yet. (Well, a few of you might be!)

But surely there are tendencies... there is promise!

And Christ is a **most** capable, winsome and loving leader!

So I do not doubt but that, one day, I shall see you in that light.

I have **reason** to hope so! And so do **all** of you.

Finally, as we prepare to move toward celebrating Holy Communion with our Lord, I want to circle back to the Epistle lesson paired with the gospel for this day.

I'd like us to hear once more Paul's good guidance, God's life-giving counsel for disciples like us:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;

love one another with mutual affection;

outdo one another in showing honour.

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

As those to whom Christ has extended holy hospitality, you and I have much to celebrate, much to receive and much to offer as we follow in his way.

Thanks be to God for that!

Out of His Way and In His Way
Romans 12:9-21 and Matthew 16:21-28
Towson PC 3 September 2017
Rev. William Nickels

Preface

As we prepare to listen to a portion of Matthew's gospel this morning, I want to set the scene for you... particularly any of you who were not here last Sunday when Joel focused on the preceding verses.

If you **were** here (and if you were listening!), you know that at this point in the story, Jesus and the disciples are out on the road together...

preaching and teaching and feeding and healing and **challenging** people by telling them that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near... that it was even **then upon** them.

And the people are wondering just who Jesus is?

Elijah, perhaps? Or Jeremiah? Or one of the **other** prophets?

Or, maybe John the Baptist... who'd somehow been raised from the dead and was back at work?

All kinds of **possibilities** are being floated by folks.

But, Jesus asks his disciples, *Who do **you** say that I am?*

For a time, I imagine, everything went silent as words started forming in the minds of Christ's followers.

You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, Simon Peter finally offers.

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah – for my Father himself has revealed this to you.

Now, reading from Matthew, Chapter 16, beginning at verse 21 –

From that time on, Jesus began to **show** his disciples that he must **go to Jerusalem** and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and **be killed**, and on the third day **be raised**.

And Peter **took him** aside and began to rebuke him, saying, *God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you!*

But he turned and said to Peter, *Get **behind** me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.*

Then Jesus told his disciples, *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*

For the word of God in scripture,
for the word of God among us,
for the word of God within us,
Thanks be to God.

Jesus began to show Peter and the other disciples that he must go... go to **Jerusalem**... and **undergo** great suffering... and be killed... and on the third day be raised.

He began to **show** them.

Now, to be honest, we don't know **what** that **means**, exactly.

Matthew didn't say that Jesus began to **tell** them he had to go, but rather, that he started to **show** them.

So it had to involve something **more** than speech.

I think he must have done something physical, like turning in the **direction** of Jerusalem and heading **off** that way...

maybe **pantomiming** suffering... and dying... and maybe even being resurrected.

Whatever it was, it's not spelled out.

But, whatever he **did**, we know that it moved Peter **profoundly** and **physically**.

We **know** this... because we're told that Peter **took** Jesus. He took Jesus **aside**... and rebuked him.

Now I **picture** that strong-armed fisherman jumping up in **front** of Jesus, grabbing him and then pushing him back and off the road, while declaring, *This must never happen to you!*

It's an image of a follower **asserting authority** over a leader, taking **control**... or **trying** to... a kind of a *coupe*.

But Jesus would have none of it. **Turning** away from Peter, he said, *Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me, here... standing in my way.*

Christ had somewhere to **go**, somewhere he knew he **must** go –

I must go to Jerusalem, and suffer, and be killed, and be raised.

And he would not allow anyone to hinder him as he went that way.

Peter **tried** to... putting up some **resistance**.

So, Jesus put Peter **in his place** – put him back **behind** him.

A **disciple's** proper **place**, we are shown, is **behind** Jesus.

Now, *disciple* is a word many of us would use in describing ourselves.

So, let me ask **you** now, are you **behind** Jesus?

Are you letting him lead you? Are you accepting his direction?

Are you listening **consciously** for his voice, his call, his instruction?

Are you responding to him faithfully, **following** as he goes?

Or, are **you** jumping up in front of him and blocking his way?

Are you **preventing** him from proceeding on the path he has chosen... **hindering** him from **taking you** where he wants and needs you to be?

Are you saying things like:

*Now, wait a minute, Jesus. How about letting **me** lead. I **know** where we need to go. I know where we ought to be heading.*

And, I know how to get us there without all this suffering and conflict and effort. My God, who wants that? Who needs that? Not you. Not me!

*Let **me** lead, Jesus. Let me take the **wheel**. I know a better road to steer us down than the one **you've** chosen.*

I know a smoother road, an easier way we can go than the one you're proposing - OK?

Maybe, like Peter, we **have** at times gotten up in **front** of Jesus to block the way, to **turn** him from the course he's set.

Or, maybe you're **considering** doing it **now**... in light of where he seems to be leading you, personally... or where it looks like he's taking this community of faith.

Well, I've a hunch that **our** Lord's not likely to allow **any** one to hinder him for **long**. He certainly didn't let Peter.

*Get **behind** me*, he said with that voice of **command**.

(And you can be **sure** that's **just** what Peter **did**!)

*Get **behind** me*, he calls out now to us, commanding and urging **us**, as well. *And follow... follow **me**... your **Lord**.*

Honestly, friend – are you man, woman or child **enough** to **refuse** him?

He has so **much** authority; and he is so faithful, and wise, and so full of **love** for us; and he is so trustworthy – like no one else in the whole wide world.

Why ever **would** we **refuse** him?

Well, at any rate, soon **enough**, that day, Christ **was** on his way.

He'd made it pretty **clear** that, while it was a way that would cost him dearly, it would, in the **end**, bring him **into life**...

into resurrection life... life in **all** fullness...

life in comparison to which the suffering would be as nothing.

And for everyone who followed him, it would be the **same**.

Even **as** they traveled that way **together**, in **spite** of the challenges, the hardship and the suffering they'd face, Christ's disciples would sense the **quality** of that rich, full life that was coming.

They'd sense its abundance overflowing the future, spilling back into their lives.

They would **sense** it in the **pleasure** they'd feel being on the road with Jesus...

in the **satisfaction** they'd feel while helping him work;

in the **reassurance** they'd feel whenever they shared a meal or prayed with him;

in the **consolation** that would come when they suffered along with him and for his sake;

and in the **joy** they'd feel while worshipping the Living God.

They would sense it. And **you and I** – don't we sense it, too, as we follow in our Savior's way?

Satisfaction. Reassurance. Consolation. Joy!

*In **this** world, you **have** tribulation – **indeed!** But, be of good cheer – I have **overcome** the world! Come along, and come over **with** me!*

His disciples sense... they **know as they go**... that they are following their Master **into Life... abundant Life**...

as long as they **are** following him... not ignoring him... not hindering him... but following him...

as **long** as they're **behind** him.

Are **you** behind him now? Are you **following** Christ, your leader?

Are you staying out of his way... and are you in his way?

Well, friends, here at Towson Presbyterian – it seems that Christ **is** leading you... that you're on your way **together** to something new.

Your Lord is **taking** you where **he** wants you to go... to become, along with Rob and Joel, what **he** intends for you to become... to do what God needs you to do for his sake in this community.

I sense that you're energized and grateful and hopeful as you engage with Christ's help in a vigorous ministry;

Maybe you're becoming the **angels** he promised he'd be bringing with him one day.

You're not angels yet. (Well, a few of you might be!)

But surely there are tendencies... there is promise!

And Christ is a **most** capable, winsome and loving leader!

So I do not doubt but that, one day, I shall see you in that light.

I have **reason** to hope so! And so do **all** of you.

Finally, as we prepare to move toward celebrating Holy Communion with our Lord, I want to circle back to the Epistle lesson paired with the gospel for this day.

I'd like us to hear once more Paul's good guidance, God's life-giving counsel for disciples like us:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;

love one another with mutual affection;

outdo one another in showing honour.

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

As those to whom Christ has extended holy hospitality, you and I have much to celebrate, much to receive and much to offer as we follow in his way.

Thanks be to God for that!

Out of His Way and In His Way
Romans 12:9-21 and Matthew 16:21-28
Towson PC 3 September 2017
Rev. William Nickels

Preface

As we prepare to listen to a portion of Matthew's gospel this morning, I want to set the scene for you... particularly any of you who were not here last Sunday when Joel focused on the preceding verses.

If you **were** here (and if you were listening!), you know that at this point in the story, Jesus and the disciples are out on the road together...

preaching and teaching and feeding and healing and **challenging** people by telling them that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near... that it was even **then upon** them.

And the people are wondering just who Jesus is?

Elijah, perhaps? Or Jeremiah? Or one of the **other** prophets?

Or, maybe John the Baptist... who'd somehow been raised from the dead and was back at work?

All kinds of **possibilities** are being floated by folks.

*But, Jesus asks his disciples, **Who do you say that I am?***

For a time, I imagine, everything went silent as words started forming in the minds of Christ's followers.

You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, Simon Peter finally offers.

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah – for my Father himself has revealed this to you.

Now, reading from Matthew, Chapter 16, beginning at verse 21 –

From that time on, Jesus began to **show** his disciples that he must **go to Jerusalem** and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and **be killed**, and on the third day **be raised**.

And Peter **took him** aside and began to rebuke him, saying, *God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you!*

But he turned and said to Peter, *Get **behind** me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.*

Then Jesus told his disciples, *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*

For the word of God in scripture,
for the word of God among us,
for the word of God within us,
Thanks be to God.

Jesus began to show Peter and the other disciples that he must go... go to **Jerusalem**... and **undergo** great suffering... and be killed... and on the third day be raised.

He began to **show** them.

Now, to be honest, we don't know **what** that **means**, exactly.

Matthew didn't say that Jesus began to **tell** them he had to go, but rather, that he started to **show** them.

So it had to involve something **more** than speech.

I think he must have done something physical, like turning in the **direction** of Jerusalem and heading **off** that way...

maybe **pantomiming** suffering... and dying... and maybe even being resurrected.

Whatever it was, it's not spelled out.

But, whatever he **did**, we know that it moved Peter **profoundly** and **physically**.

We **know** this... because we're told that Peter **took** Jesus. He took Jesus **aside**... and rebuked him.

Now I **picture** that strong-armed fisherman jumping up in **front** of Jesus, grabbing him and then pushing him back and off the road, while declaring, *This must never happen to you!*

It's an image of a follower **asserting authority** over a leader, taking **control**... or **trying** to... a kind of a *coupe*.

But Jesus would have none of it. **Turning** away from Peter, he said, *Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me, here... standing in my way.*

Christ had somewhere to **go**, somewhere he knew he **must** go –

I must go to Jerusalem, and suffer, and be killed, and be raised.

And he would not allow anyone to hinder him as he went that way.

Peter **tried** to... putting up some **resistance**.

So, Jesus put Peter **in his place** – put him back **behind** him.

A **disciple's** proper **place**, we are shown, is **behind** Jesus.

Now, *disciple* is a word many of us would use in describing ourselves.

So, let me ask **you** now, are you **behind** Jesus?

Are you letting him lead you? Are you accepting his direction?

Are you listening **consciously** for his voice, his call, his instruction?

Are you responding to him faithfully, **following** as he goes?

Or, are **you** jumping up in front of him and blocking his way?

Are you **preventing** him from proceeding on the path he has chosen... **hindering** him from **taking you** where he wants and needs you to be?

Are you saying things like:

*Now, wait a minute, Jesus. How about letting **me** lead. I **know** where we need to go. I know where we ought to be heading.*

And, I know how to get us there without all this suffering and conflict and effort. My God, who wants that? Who needs that? Not you. Not me!

*Let **me** lead, Jesus. Let me take the **wheel**. I know a better road to steer us down than the one **you've** chosen.*

I know a smoother road, an easier way we can go than the one you're proposing - OK?

Maybe, like Peter, we **have** at times gotten up in **front** of Jesus to block the way, to **turn** him from the course he's set.

Or, maybe you're **considering** doing it **now**... in light of where he seems to be leading you, personally... or where it looks like he's taking this community of faith.

Well, I've a hunch that **our** Lord's not likely to allow **any** one to hinder him for **long**. He certainly didn't let Peter.

*Get **behind** me*, he said with that voice of **command**.

(And you can be **sure** that's **just** what Peter **did**!)

*Get **behind** me*, he calls out now to us, commanding and urging **us**, as well. *And follow... follow **me**... your **Lord**.*

Honestly, friend – are you man, woman or child **enough** to **refuse** him?

He has so **much** authority; and he is so faithful, and wise, and so full of **love** for us; and he is so trustworthy – like no one else in the whole wide world.

Why ever **would** we **refuse** him?

Well, at any rate, soon **enough**, that day, Christ **was** on his way.

He'd made it pretty **clear** that, while it was a way that would cost him dearly, it would, in the **end**, bring him **into life**...

into resurrection life... life in **all** fullness...

life in comparison to which the suffering would be as nothing.

And for everyone who followed him, it would be the **same**.

Even **as** they traveled that way **together**, in **spite** of the challenges, the hardship and the suffering they'd face, Christ's disciples would sense the **quality** of that rich, full life that was coming.

They'd sense its abundance overflowing the future, spilling back into their lives.

They would **sense** it in the **pleasure** they'd feel being on the road with Jesus...

in the **satisfaction** they'd feel while helping him work;

in the **reassurance** they'd feel whenever they shared a meal or prayed with him;

in the **consolation** that would come when they suffered along with him and for his sake;

and in the **joy** they'd feel while worshipping the Living God.

They would sense it. And **you and I** – don't we sense it, too, as we follow in our Savior's way?

Satisfaction. Reassurance. Consolation. Joy!

*In **this** world, you **have** tribulation – **indeed!** But, be of good cheer – I have **overcome** the world! Come along, and come over **with** me!*

His disciples sense... they **know as they go**... that they are following their Master **into Life... abundant Life**...

as long as they **are** following him... not ignoring him... not hindering him... but following him...

as **long** as they're **behind** him.

Are **you** behind him now? Are you **following** Christ, your leader?

Are you staying out of his way... and are you in his way?

Well, friends, here at Towson Presbyterian – it seems that Christ **is** leading you... that you're on your way **together** to something new.

Your Lord is **taking** you where **he** wants you to go... to become, along with Rob and Joel, what **he** intends for you to become... to do what God needs you to do for his sake in this community.

I sense that you're energized and grateful and hopeful as you engage with Christ's help in a vigorous ministry;

Maybe you're becoming the **angels** he promised he'd be bringing with him one day.

You're not angels yet. (Well, a few of you might be!)

But surely there are tendencies... there is promise!

And Christ is a **most** capable, winsome and loving leader!

So I do not doubt but that, one day, I shall see you in that light.

I have **reason** to hope so! And so do **all** of you.

Finally, as we prepare to move toward celebrating Holy Communion with our Lord, I want to circle back to the Epistle lesson paired with the gospel for this day.

I'd like us to hear once more Paul's good guidance, God's life-giving counsel for disciples like us:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;

love one another with mutual affection;

outdo one another in showing honour.

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

As those to whom Christ has extended holy hospitality, you and I have much to celebrate, much to receive and much to offer as we follow in his way.

Thanks be to God for that!

Out of His Way and In His Way
Romans 12:9-21 and Matthew 16:21-28
Towson PC 3 September 2017
Rev. William Nickels

Preface

As we prepare to listen to a portion of Matthew's gospel this morning, I want to set the scene for you... particularly any of you who were not here last Sunday when Joel focused on the preceding verses.

If you **were** here (and if you were listening!), you know that at this point in the story, Jesus and the disciples are out on the road together...

preaching and teaching and feeding and healing and **challenging** people by telling them that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near... that it was even **then upon** them.

And the people are wondering just who Jesus is?

Elijah, perhaps? Or Jeremiah? Or one of the **other** prophets?

Or, maybe John the Baptist... who'd somehow been raised from the dead and was back at work?

All kinds of **possibilities** are being floated by folks.

*But, Jesus asks his disciples, Who do **you** say that I am?*

For a time, I imagine, everything went silent as words started forming in the minds of Christ's followers.

You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, Simon Peter finally offers.

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah – for my Father himself has revealed this to you.

Now, reading from Matthew, Chapter 16, beginning at verse 21 –

From that time on, Jesus began to **show** his disciples that he must **go to Jerusalem** and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and **be killed**, and on the third day **be raised**.

And Peter **took him** aside and began to rebuke him, saying, *God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you!*

But he turned and said to Peter, *Get **behind** me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.*

Then Jesus told his disciples, *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*

For the word of God in scripture,
for the word of God among us,
for the word of God within us,
Thanks be to God.

Jesus began to show Peter and the other disciples that he must go... go to **Jerusalem**... and **undergo** great suffering... and be killed... and on the third day be raised.

He began to **show** them.

Now, to be honest, we don't know **what** that **means**, exactly.

Matthew didn't say that Jesus began to **tell** them he had to go, but rather, that he started to **show** them.

So it had to involve something **more** than speech.

I think he must have done something physical, like turning in the **direction** of Jerusalem and heading **off** that way...

maybe **pantomiming** suffering... and dying... and maybe even being resurrected.

Whatever it was, it's not spelled out.

But, whatever he **did**, we know that it moved Peter **profoundly** and **physically**.

We **know** this... because we're told that Peter **took** Jesus. He took Jesus **aside**... and rebuked him.

Now I **picture** that strong-armed fisherman jumping up in **front** of Jesus, grabbing him and then pushing him back and off the road, while declaring, *This must never happen to you!*

It's an image of a follower **asserting authority** over a leader, taking **control**... or **trying** to... a kind of a coupe.

But Jesus would have none of it. **Turning** away from Peter, he said, *Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me, here... standing in my way.*

Christ had somewhere to **go**, somewhere he knew he **must** go –

I must go to Jerusalem, and suffer, and be killed, and be raised.

And he would not allow anyone to hinder him as he went that way.

Peter **tried** to... putting up some **resistance**.

So, Jesus put Peter **in his place** – put him back **behind** him.

A **disciple's** proper **place**, we are shown, is **behind** Jesus.

Now, *disciple* is a word many of us would use in describing ourselves.

So, let me ask **you** now, are you **behind** Jesus?

Are you letting him lead you? Are you accepting his direction?

Are you listening **consciously** for his voice, his call, his instruction?

Are you responding to him faithfully, **following** as he goes?

Or, are **you** jumping up in front of him and blocking his way?

Are you **preventing** him from proceeding on the path he has chosen... **hindering** him from **taking you** where he wants and needs you to be?

Are you saying things like:

*Now, wait a minute, Jesus. How about letting **me** lead. I **know** where we need to go. I know where we ought to be heading.*

And, I know how to get us there without all this suffering and conflict and effort. My God, who wants that? Who needs that? Not you. Not me!

*Let **me** lead, Jesus. Let me take the **wheel**. I know a better road to steer us down than the one **you've** chosen.*

I know a smoother road, an easier way we can go than the one you're proposing - OK?

Maybe, like Peter, we **have** at times gotten up in **front** of Jesus to block the way, to **turn** him from the course he's set.

Or, maybe you're **considering** doing it **now**... in light of where he seems to be leading you, personally... or where it looks like he's taking this community of faith.

Well, I've a hunch that **our** Lord's not likely to allow **any** one to hinder him for **long**. He certainly didn't let Peter.

*Get **behind** me*, he said with that voice of **command**.

(And you can be **sure** that's **just** what Peter **did**!)

*Get **behind** me*, he calls out now to us, commanding and urging **us**, as well. *And follow... follow **me**... your **Lord**.*

Honestly, friend – are you man, woman or child **enough** to **refuse** him?

He has so **much** authority; and he is so faithful, and wise, and so full of **love** for us; and he is so trustworthy – like no one else in the whole wide world.

Why ever **would** we **refuse** him?

Well, at any rate, soon **enough**, that day, Christ **was** on his way.

He'd made it pretty **clear** that, while it was a way that would cost him dearly, it would, in the **end**, bring him **into life**...

into resurrection life... life in **all** fullness...

life in comparison to which the suffering would be as nothing.

And for everyone who followed him, it would be the **same**.

Even **as** they traveled that way **together**, in **spite** of the challenges, the hardship and the suffering they'd face, Christ's disciples would sense the **quality** of that rich, full life that was coming.

They'd sense its abundance overflowing the future, spilling back into their lives.

They would **sense** it in the **pleasure** they'd feel being on the road with Jesus...

in the **satisfaction** they'd feel while helping him work;

in the **reassurance** they'd feel whenever they shared a meal or prayed with him;

in the **consolation** that would come when they suffered along with him and for his sake;

and in the **joy** they'd feel while worshipping the Living God.

They would sense it. And **you and I** – don't we sense it, too, as we follow in our Savior's way?

Satisfaction. Reassurance. Consolation. Joy!

*In **this** world, you **have** tribulation – **indeed!** But, be of good cheer – I have **overcome** the world! Come along, and come over **with** me!*

His disciples sense... they **know as they go**... that they are following their Master **into Life... abundant Life**...

as long as they **are** following him... not ignoring him... not hindering him... but following him...

as **long** as they're **behind** him.

Are **you** behind him now? Are you **following** Christ, your leader?

Are you staying out of his way... and are you in his way?

Well, friends, here at Towson Presbyterian – it seems that Christ **is** leading you... that you're on your way **together** to something new.

Your Lord is **taking** you where **he** wants you to go... to become, along with Rob and Joel, what **he** intends for you to become... to do what God needs you to do for his sake in this community.

I sense that you're energized and grateful and hopeful as you engage with Christ's help in a vigorous ministry;

Maybe you're becoming the **angels** he promised he'd be bringing with him one day.

You're not angels yet. (Well, a few of you might be!)

But surely there are tendencies... there is promise!

And Christ is a **most** capable, winsome and loving leader!

So I do not doubt but that, one day, I shall see you in that light.

I have **reason** to hope so! And so do **all** of you.

Finally, as we prepare to move toward celebrating Holy Communion with our Lord, I want to circle back to the Epistle lesson paired with the gospel for this day.

I'd like us to hear once more Paul's good guidance, God's life-giving counsel for disciples like us:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;

love one another with mutual affection;

outdo one another in showing honour.

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

As those to whom Christ has extended holy hospitality, you and I have much to celebrate, much to receive and much to offer as we follow in his way.

Thanks be to God for that!

Out of His Way and In His Way
Romans 12:9-21 and Matthew 16:21-28
Towson PC 3 September 2017
Rev. William Nickels

Preface

As we prepare to listen to a portion of Matthew's gospel this morning, I want to set the scene for you... particularly any of you who were not here last Sunday when Joel focused on the preceding verses.

If you **were** here (and if you were listening!), you know that at this point in the story, Jesus and the disciples are out on the road together...

preaching and teaching and feeding and healing and **challenging** people by telling them that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near... that it was even **then upon** them.

And the people are wondering just who Jesus is?

Elijah, perhaps? Or Jeremiah? Or one of the **other** prophets?

Or, maybe John the Baptist... who'd somehow been raised from the dead and was back at work?

All kinds of **possibilities** are being floated by folks.

But, Jesus asks his disciples, *Who do **you** say that I am?*

For a time, I imagine, everything went silent as words started forming in the minds of Christ's followers.

You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, Simon Peter finally offers.

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah – for my Father himself has revealed this to you.

Now, reading from Matthew, Chapter 16, beginning at verse 21 –

From that time on, Jesus began to **show** his disciples that he must **go to Jerusalem** and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and **be killed**, and on the third day **be raised**.

And Peter **took him** aside and began to rebuke him, saying, *God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you!*

But he turned and said to Peter, *Get **behind** me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.*

Then Jesus told his disciples, *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*

For the word of God in scripture,
for the word of God among us,
for the word of God within us,
Thanks be to God.

Jesus began to show Peter and the other disciples that he must go... go to **Jerusalem**... and **undergo** great suffering... and be killed... and on the third day be raised.

He began to **show** them.

Now, to be honest, we don't know **what** that **means**, exactly.

Matthew didn't say that Jesus began to **tell** them he had to go, but rather, that he started to **show** them.

So it had to involve something **more** than speech.

I think he must have done something physical, like turning in the **direction** of Jerusalem and heading **off** that way...

maybe **pantomiming** suffering... and dying... and maybe even being resurrected.

Whatever it was, it's not spelled out.

But, whatever he **did**, we know that it moved Peter **profoundly** and **physically**.

We **know** this... because we're told that Peter **took** Jesus. He took Jesus **aside**... and rebuked him.

Now I **picture** that strong-armed fisherman jumping up in **front** of Jesus, grabbing him and then pushing him back and off the road, while declaring, *This must never happen to you!*

It's an image of a follower **asserting authority** over a leader, taking **control**... or **trying** to... a kind of a *coupe*.

But Jesus would have none of it. **Turning** away from Peter, he said, *Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me, here... standing in my way.*

Christ had somewhere to **go**, somewhere he knew he **must** go –

I must go to Jerusalem, and suffer, and be killed, and be raised.

And he would not allow anyone to hinder him as he went that way.

Peter **tried** to... putting up some **resistance**.

So, Jesus put Peter **in his place** – put him back **behind** him.

A **disciple's** proper **place**, we are shown, is **behind** Jesus.

Now, *disciple* is a word many of us would use in describing ourselves.

So, let me ask **you** now, are you **behind** Jesus?

Are you letting him lead you? Are you accepting his direction?

Are you listening **consciously** for his voice, his call, his instruction?

Are you responding to him faithfully, **following** as he goes?

Or, are **you** jumping up in front of him and blocking his way?

Are you **preventing** him from proceeding on the path he has chosen... **hindering** him from **taking you** where he wants and needs you to be?

Are you saying things like:

*Now, wait a minute, Jesus. How about letting **me** lead. I **know** where we need to go. I know where we ought to be heading.*

And, I know how to get us there without all this suffering and conflict and effort. My God, who wants that? Who needs that? Not you. Not me!

*Let **me** lead, Jesus. Let me take the **wheel**. I know a better road to steer us down than the one **you've** chosen.*

I know a smoother road, an easier way we can go than the one you're proposing - OK?

Maybe, like Peter, we **have** at times gotten up in **front** of Jesus to block the way, to **turn** him from the course he's set.

Or, maybe you're **considering** doing it **now**... in light of where he seems to be leading you, personally... or where it looks like he's taking this community of faith.

Well, I've a hunch that **our** Lord's not likely to allow **any** one to hinder him for **long**. He certainly didn't let Peter.

*Get **behind** me*, he said with that voice of **command**.

(And you can be **sure** that's **just** what Peter **did**!)

*Get **behind** me*, he calls out now to us, commanding and urging **us**, as well. *And follow... follow **me**... your **Lord**.*

Honestly, friend – are you man, woman or child **enough** to **refuse** him?

He has so **much** authority; and he is so faithful, and wise, and so full of **love** for us; and he is so trustworthy – like no one else in the whole wide world.

Why ever **would** we **refuse** him?

Well, at any rate, soon **enough**, that day, Christ **was** on his way.

He'd made it pretty **clear** that, while it was a way that would cost him dearly, it would, in the **end**, bring him **into life**...

into resurrection life... life in **all** fullness...

life in comparison to which the suffering would be as nothing.

And for everyone who followed him, it would be the **same**.

Even **as** they traveled that way **together**, in **spite** of the challenges, the hardship and the suffering they'd face, Christ's disciples would sense the **quality** of that rich, full life that was coming.

They'd sense its abundance overflowing the future, spilling back into their lives.

They would **sense** it in the **pleasure** they'd feel being on the road with Jesus...

in the **satisfaction** they'd feel while helping him work;

in the **reassurance** they'd feel whenever they shared a meal or prayed with him;

in the **consolation** that would come when they suffered along with him and for his sake;

and in the **joy** they'd feel while worshipping the Living God.

They would sense it. And **you and I** – don't we sense it, too, as we follow in our Savior's way?

Satisfaction. Reassurance. Consolation. Joy!

*In **this** world, you **have** tribulation – **indeed!** But, be of good cheer – I have **overcome** the world! Come along, and come over **with** me!*

His disciples sense... they **know as they go**... that they are following their Master **into Life... abundant Life**...

as long as they **are** following him... not ignoring him... not hindering him... but following him...

as **long** as they're **behind** him.

Are **you** behind him now? Are you **following** Christ, your leader?

Are you staying out of his way... and are you in his way?

Well, friends, here at Towson Presbyterian – it seems that Christ **is** leading you... that you're on your way **together** to something new.

Your Lord is **taking** you where **he** wants you to go... to become, along with Rob and Joel, what **he** intends for you to become... to do what God needs you to do for his sake in this community.

I sense that you're energized and grateful and hopeful as you engage with Christ's help in a vigorous ministry;

Maybe you're becoming the **angels** he promised he'd be bringing with him one day.

You're not angels yet. (Well, a few of you might be!)

But surely there are tendencies... there is promise!

And Christ is a **most** capable, winsome and loving leader!

So I do not doubt but that, one day, I shall see you in that light.

I have **reason** to hope so! And so do **all** of you.

Finally, as we prepare to move toward celebrating Holy Communion with our Lord, I want to circle back to the Epistle lesson paired with the gospel for this day.

I'd like us to hear once more Paul's good guidance, God's life-giving counsel for disciples like us:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;

love one another with mutual affection;

outdo one another in showing honour.

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

As those to whom Christ has extended holy hospitality, you and I have much to celebrate, much to receive and much to offer as we follow in his way.

Thanks be to God for that!

Out of His Way and In His Way
Romans 12:9-21 and Matthew 16:21-28
Towson PC 3 September 2017
Rev. William Nickels

Preface

As we prepare to listen to a portion of Matthew's gospel this morning, I want to set the scene for you... particularly any of you who were not here last Sunday when Joel focused on the preceding verses.

If you **were** here (and if you were listening!), you know that at this point in the story, Jesus and the disciples are out on the road together...

preaching and teaching and feeding and healing and **challenging** people by telling them that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near... that it was even **then upon** them.

And the people are wondering just who Jesus is?

Elijah, perhaps? Or Jeremiah? Or one of the **other** prophets?

Or, maybe John the Baptist... who'd somehow been raised from the dead and was back at work?

All kinds of **possibilities** are being floated by folks.

But, Jesus asks his disciples, *Who do **you** say that I am?*

For a time, I imagine, everything went silent as words started forming in the minds of Christ's followers.

You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, Simon Peter finally offers.

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah – for my Father himself has revealed this to you.

Now, reading from Matthew, Chapter 16, beginning at verse 21 –

From that time on, Jesus began to **show** his disciples that he must **go to Jerusalem** and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and **be killed**, and on the third day **be raised**.

And Peter **took him** aside and began to rebuke him, saying, *God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you!*

But he turned and said to Peter, *Get **behind** me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.*

Then Jesus told his disciples, *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*

For the word of God in scripture,
for the word of God among us,
for the word of God within us,
Thanks be to God.

Jesus began to show Peter and the other disciples that he must go... go to **Jerusalem**... and **undergo** great suffering... and be killed... and on the third day be raised.

He began to **show** them.

Now, to be honest, we don't know **what** that **means**, exactly.

Matthew didn't say that Jesus began to **tell** them he had to go, but rather, that he started to **show** them.

So it had to involve something **more** than speech.

I think he must have done something physical, like turning in the **direction** of Jerusalem and heading **off** that way...

maybe **pantomiming** suffering... and dying... and maybe even being resurrected.

Whatever it was, it's not spelled out.

But, whatever he **did**, we know that it moved Peter **profoundly** and **physically**.

We **know** this... because we're told that Peter **took** Jesus. He took Jesus **aside**... and rebuked him.

Now I **picture** that strong-armed fisherman jumping up in **front** of Jesus, grabbing him and then pushing him back and off the road, while declaring, *This must never happen to you!*

It's an image of a follower **asserting authority** over a leader, taking **control**... or **trying** to... a kind of a *coupe*.

But Jesus would have none of it. **Turning** away from Peter, he said, *Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me, here... standing in my way.*

Christ had somewhere to **go**, somewhere he knew he **must** go –

I must go to Jerusalem, and suffer, and be killed, and be raised.

And he would not allow anyone to hinder him as he went that way.

Peter **tried** to... putting up some **resistance**.

So, Jesus put Peter **in his place** – put him back **behind** him.

A **disciple's** proper **place**, we are shown, is **behind** Jesus.

Now, *disciple* is a word many of us would use in describing ourselves.

So, let me ask **you** now, are you **behind** Jesus?

Are you letting him lead you? Are you accepting his direction?

Are you listening **consciously** for his voice, his call, his instruction?

Are you responding to him faithfully, **following** as he goes?

Or, are **you** jumping up in front of him and blocking his way?

Are you **preventing** him from proceeding on the path he has chosen... **hindering** him from **taking you** where he wants and needs you to be?

Are you saying things like:

*Now, wait a minute, Jesus. How about letting **me** lead. I **know** where we need to go. I know where we ought to be heading.*

And, I know how to get us there without all this suffering and conflict and effort. My God, who wants that? Who needs that? Not you. Not me!

*Let **me** lead, Jesus. Let me take the **wheel**. I know a better road to steer us down than the one **you've** chosen.*

I know a smoother road, an easier way we can go than the one you're proposing - OK?

Maybe, like Peter, we **have** at times gotten up in **front** of Jesus to block the way, to **turn** him from the course he's set.

Or, maybe you're **considering** doing it **now**... in light of where he seems to be leading you, personally... or where it looks like he's taking this community of faith.

Well, I've a hunch that **our** Lord's not likely to allow **any** one to hinder him for **long**. He certainly didn't let Peter.

*Get **behind** me*, he said with that voice of **command**.

(And you can be **sure** that's **just** what Peter **did**!)

*Get **behind** me*, he calls out now to us, commanding and urging **us**, as well. *And follow... follow **me**... your **Lord**.*

Honestly, friend – are you man, woman or child **enough** to **refuse** him?

He has so **much** authority; and he is so faithful, and wise, and so full of **love** for us; and he is so trustworthy – like no one else in the whole wide world.

Why ever **would** we **refuse** him?

Well, at any rate, soon **enough**, that day, Christ **was** on his way.

He'd made it pretty **clear** that, while it was a way that would cost him dearly, it would, in the **end**, bring him **into life**...

into resurrection life... life in **all** fullness...

life in comparison to which the suffering would be as nothing.

And for everyone who followed him, it would be the **same**.

Even **as** they traveled that way **together**, in **spite** of the challenges, the hardship and the suffering they'd face, Christ's disciples would sense the **quality** of that rich, full life that was coming.

They'd sense its abundance overflowing the future, spilling back into their lives.

They would **sense** it in the **pleasure** they'd feel being on the road with Jesus...

in the **satisfaction** they'd feel while helping him work;

in the **reassurance** they'd feel whenever they shared a meal or prayed with him;

in the **consolation** that would come when they suffered along with him and for his sake;

and in the **joy** they'd feel while worshipping the Living God.

They would sense it. And **you and I** – don't we sense it, too, as we follow in our Savior's way?

Satisfaction. Reassurance. Consolation. Joy!

*In **this** world, you **have** tribulation – **indeed!** But, be of good cheer – I have **overcome** the world! Come along, and come over **with** me!*

His disciples sense... they **know as they go**... that they are following their Master **into Life... abundant Life**...

as long as they **are** following him... not ignoring him... not hindering him... but following him...

as **long** as they're **behind** him.

Are **you** behind him now? Are you **following** Christ, your leader?

Are you staying out of his way... and are you in his way?

Well, friends, here at Towson Presbyterian – it seems that Christ **is** leading you... that you're on your way **together** to something new.

Your Lord is **taking** you where **he** wants you to go... to become, along with Rob and Joel, what **he** intends for you to become... to do what God needs you to do for his sake in this community.

I sense that you're energized and grateful and hopeful as you engage with Christ's help in a vigorous ministry;

Maybe you're becoming the **angels** he promised he'd be bringing with him one day.

You're not angels yet. (Well, a few of you might be!)

But surely there are tendencies... there is promise!

And Christ is a **most** capable, winsome and loving leader!

So I do not doubt but that, one day, I shall see you in that light.

I have **reason** to hope so! And so do **all** of you.

Finally, as we prepare to move toward celebrating Holy Communion with our Lord, I want to circle back to the Epistle lesson paired with the gospel for this day.

I'd like us to hear once more Paul's good guidance, God's life-giving counsel for disciples like us:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;

love one another with mutual affection;

outdo one another in showing honour.

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

As those to whom Christ has extended holy hospitality, you and I have much to celebrate, much to receive and much to offer as we follow in his way.

Thanks be to God for that!

Out of His Way and In His Way
Romans 12:9-21 and Matthew 16:21-28
Towson PC 3 September 2017
Rev. William Nickels

Preface

As we prepare to listen to a portion of Matthew's gospel this morning, I want to set the scene for you... particularly any of you who were not here last Sunday when Joel focused on the preceding verses.

If you **were** here (and if you were listening!), you know that at this point in the story, Jesus and the disciples are out on the road together...

preaching and teaching and feeding and healing and **challenging** people by telling them that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near... that it was even **then upon** them.

And the people are wondering just who Jesus is?

Elijah, perhaps? Or Jeremiah? Or one of the **other** prophets?

Or, maybe John the Baptist... who'd somehow been raised from the dead and was back at work?

All kinds of **possibilities** are being floated by folks.

*But, Jesus asks his disciples, **Who do you say that I am?***

For a time, I imagine, everything went silent as words started forming in the minds of Christ's followers.

You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, Simon Peter finally offers.

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah – for my Father himself has revealed this to you.

Now, reading from Matthew, Chapter 16, beginning at verse 21 –

From that time on, Jesus began to **show** his disciples that he must **go to Jerusalem** and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and **be killed**, and on the third day **be raised**.

And Peter **took him** aside and began to rebuke him, saying, *God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you!*

But he turned and said to Peter, *Get **behind** me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.*

Then Jesus told his disciples, *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*

For the word of God in scripture,
for the word of God among us,
for the word of God within us,
Thanks be to God.

Jesus began to show Peter and the other disciples that he must go... go to **Jerusalem**... and **undergo** great suffering... and be killed... and on the third day be raised.

He began to **show** them.

Now, to be honest, we don't know **what** that **means**, exactly.

Matthew didn't say that Jesus began to **tell** them he had to go, but rather, that he started to **show** them.

So it had to involve something **more** than speech.

I think he must have done something physical, like turning in the **direction** of Jerusalem and heading **off** that way...

maybe **pantomiming** suffering... and dying... and maybe even being resurrected.

Whatever it was, it's not spelled out.

But, whatever he **did**, we know that it moved Peter **profoundly** and **physically**.

We **know** this... because we're told that Peter **took** Jesus. He took Jesus **aside**... and rebuked him.

Now I **picture** that strong-armed fisherman jumping up in **front** of Jesus, grabbing him and then pushing him back and off the road, while declaring, *This must never happen to you!*

It's an image of a follower **asserting authority** over a leader, taking **control**... or **trying** to... a kind of a *coupe*.

But Jesus would have none of it. **Turning** away from Peter, he said, *Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me, here... standing in my way.*

Christ had somewhere to **go**, somewhere he knew he **must** go –

I must go to Jerusalem, and suffer, and be killed, and be raised.

And he would not allow anyone to hinder him as he went that way.

Peter **tried** to... putting up some **resistance**.

So, Jesus put Peter **in his place** – put him back **behind** him.

A **disciple's** proper **place**, we are shown, is **behind** Jesus.

Now, *disciple* is a word many of us would use in describing ourselves.

So, let me ask **you** now, are you **behind** Jesus?

Are you letting him lead you? Are you accepting his direction?

Are you listening **consciously** for his voice, his call, his instruction?

Are you responding to him faithfully, **following** as he goes?

Or, are **you** jumping up in front of him and blocking his way?

Are you **preventing** him from proceeding on the path he has chosen... **hindering** him from **taking you** where he wants and needs you to be?

Are you saying things like:

*Now, wait a minute, Jesus. How about letting **me** lead. I **know** where we need to go. I know where we ought to be heading.*

And, I know how to get us there without all this suffering and conflict and effort. My God, who wants that? Who needs that? Not you. Not me!

*Let **me** lead, Jesus. Let me take the **wheel**. I know a better road to steer us down than the one **you've** chosen.*

I know a smoother road, an easier way we can go than the one you're proposing - OK?

Maybe, like Peter, we **have** at times gotten up in **front** of Jesus to block the way, to **turn** him from the course he's set.

Or, maybe you're **considering** doing it **now**... in light of where he seems to be leading you, personally... or where it looks like he's taking this community of faith.

Well, I've a hunch that **our** Lord's not likely to allow **any** one to hinder him for **long**. He certainly didn't let Peter.

*Get **behind** me*, he said with that voice of **command**.

(And you can be **sure** that's **just** what Peter **did**!)

*Get **behind** me*, he calls out now to us, commanding and urging **us**, as well. *And follow... follow **me**... your **Lord**.*

Honestly, friend – are you man, woman or child **enough** to **refuse** him?

He has so **much** authority; and he is so faithful, and wise, and so full of **love** for us; and he is so trustworthy – like no one else in the whole wide world.

Why ever **would** we **refuse** him?

Well, at any rate, soon **enough**, that day, Christ **was** on his way.

He'd made it pretty **clear** that, while it was a way that would cost him dearly, it would, in the **end**, bring him **into life**...

into resurrection life... life in **all** fullness...

life in comparison to which the suffering would be as nothing.

And for everyone who followed him, it would be the **same**.

Even **as** they traveled that way **together**, in **spite** of the challenges, the hardship and the suffering they'd face, Christ's disciples would sense the **quality** of that rich, full life that was coming.

They'd sense its abundance overflowing the future, spilling back into their lives.

They would **sense** it in the **pleasure** they'd feel being on the road with Jesus...

in the **satisfaction** they'd feel while helping him work;

in the **reassurance** they'd feel whenever they shared a meal or prayed with him;

in the **consolation** that would come when they suffered along with him and for his sake;

and in the **joy** they'd feel while worshipping the Living God.

They would sense it. And **you and I** – don't we sense it, too, as we follow in our Savior's way?

Satisfaction. Reassurance. Consolation. Joy!

*In **this** world, you **have** tribulation – **indeed!** But, be of good cheer – I have **overcome** the world! Come along, and come over **with** me!*

His disciples sense... they **know as they go**... that they are following their Master **into Life... abundant Life**...

as long as they **are** following him... not ignoring him... not hindering him... but following him...

as **long** as they're **behind** him.

Are **you** behind him now? Are you **following** Christ, your leader?

Are you staying out of his way... and are you in his way?

Well, friends, here at Towson Presbyterian – it seems that Christ **is** leading you... that you're on your way **together** to something new.

Your Lord is **taking** you where **he** wants you to go... to become, along with Rob and Joel, what **he** intends for you to become... to do what God needs you to do for his sake in this community.

I sense that you're energized and grateful and hopeful as you engage with Christ's help in a vigorous ministry;

Maybe you're becoming the **angels** he promised he'd be bringing with him one day.

You're not angels yet. (Well, a few of you might be!)

But surely there are tendencies... there is promise!

And Christ is a **most** capable, winsome and loving leader!

So I do not doubt but that, one day, I shall see you in that light.

I have **reason** to hope so! And so do **all** of you.

Finally, as we prepare to move toward celebrating Holy Communion with our Lord, I want to circle back to the Epistle lesson paired with the gospel for this day.

I'd like us to hear once more Paul's good guidance, God's life-giving counsel for disciples like us:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;

love one another with mutual affection;

outdo one another in showing honour.

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

As those to whom Christ has extended holy hospitality, you and I have much to celebrate, much to receive and much to offer as we follow in his way.

Thanks be to God for that!

Out of His Way and In His Way
Romans 12:9-21 and Matthew 16:21-28
Towson PC 3 September 2017
Rev. William Nickels

Preface

As we prepare to listen to a portion of Matthew's gospel this morning, I want to set the scene for you... particularly any of you who were not here last Sunday when Joel focused on the preceding verses.

If you **were** here (and if you were listening!), you know that at this point in the story, Jesus and the disciples are out on the road together...

preaching and teaching and feeding and healing and **challenging** people by telling them that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near... that it was even **then upon** them.

And the people are wondering just who Jesus is?

Elijah, perhaps? Or Jeremiah? Or one of the **other** prophets?

Or, maybe John the Baptist... who'd somehow been raised from the dead and was back at work?

All kinds of **possibilities** are being floated by folks.

*But, Jesus asks his disciples, **Who do you say that I am?***

For a time, I imagine, everything went silent as words started forming in the minds of Christ's followers.

You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, Simon Peter finally offers.

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah – for my Father himself has revealed this to you.

Now, reading from Matthew, Chapter 16, beginning at verse 21 –

From that time on, Jesus began to **show** his disciples that he must **go to Jerusalem** and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and **be killed**, and on the third day **be raised**.

And Peter **took him** aside and began to rebuke him, saying, *God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you!*

But he turned and said to Peter, *Get **behind** me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.*

Then Jesus told his disciples, *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*

For the word of God in scripture,
for the word of God among us,
for the word of God within us,
Thanks be to God.

Jesus began to show Peter and the other disciples that he must go... go to **Jerusalem**... and **undergo** great suffering... and be killed... and on the third day be raised.

He began to **show** them.

Now, to be honest, we don't know **what** that **means**, exactly.

Matthew didn't say that Jesus began to **tell** them he had to go, but rather, that he started to **show** them.

So it had to involve something **more** than speech.

I think he must have done something physical, like turning in the **direction** of Jerusalem and heading **off** that way...

maybe **pantomiming** suffering... and dying... and maybe even being resurrected.

Whatever it was, it's not spelled out.

But, whatever he **did**, we know that it moved Peter **profoundly** and **physically**.

We **know** this... because we're told that Peter **took** Jesus. He took Jesus **aside**... and rebuked him.

Now I **picture** that strong-armed fisherman jumping up in **front** of Jesus, grabbing him and then pushing him back and off the road, while declaring, *This must never happen to you!*

It's an image of a follower **asserting authority** over a leader, taking **control**... or **trying** to... a kind of a *coupe*.

But Jesus would have none of it. **Turning** away from Peter, he said, *Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me, here... standing in my way.*

Christ had somewhere to **go**, somewhere he knew he **must** go –

I must go to Jerusalem, and suffer, and be killed, and be raised.

And he would not allow anyone to hinder him as he went that way.

Peter **tried** to... putting up some **resistance**.

So, Jesus put Peter **in his place** – put him back **behind** him.

A **disciple's** proper **place**, we are shown, is **behind** Jesus.

Now, *disciple* is a word many of us would use in describing ourselves.

So, let me ask **you** now, are you **behind** Jesus?

Are you letting him lead you? Are you accepting his direction?

Are you listening **consciously** for his voice, his call, his instruction?

Are you responding to him faithfully, **following** as he goes?

Or, are **you** jumping up in front of him and blocking his way?

Are you **preventing** him from proceeding on the path he has chosen... **hindering** him from **taking you** where he wants and needs you to be?

Are you saying things like:

*Now, wait a minute, Jesus. How about letting **me** lead. I **know** where we need to go. I know where we ought to be heading.*

And, I know how to get us there without all this suffering and conflict and effort. My God, who wants that? Who needs that? Not you. Not me!

*Let **me** lead, Jesus. Let me take the **wheel**. I know a better road to steer us down than the one **you've** chosen.*

I know a smoother road, an easier way we can go than the one you're proposing - OK?

Maybe, like Peter, we **have** at times gotten up in **front** of Jesus to block the way, to **turn** him from the course he's set.

Or, maybe you're **considering** doing it **now**... in light of where he seems to be leading you, personally... or where it looks like he's taking this community of faith.

Well, I've a hunch that **our** Lord's not likely to allow **any** one to hinder him for **long**. He certainly didn't let Peter.

*Get **behind** me*, he said with that voice of **command**.

(And you can be **sure** that's **just** what Peter **did**!)

*Get **behind** me*, he calls out now to us, commanding and urging **us**, as well. *And follow... follow **me**... your **Lord**.*

Honestly, friend – are you man, woman or child **enough** to **refuse** him?

He has so **much** authority; and he is so faithful, and wise, and so full of **love** for us; and he is so trustworthy – like no one else in the whole wide world.

Why ever **would** we **refuse** him?

Well, at any rate, soon **enough**, that day, Christ **was** on his way.

He'd made it pretty **clear** that, while it was a way that would cost him dearly, it would, in the **end**, bring him **into life**...

into resurrection life... life in **all** fullness...

life in comparison to which the suffering would be as nothing.

And for everyone who followed him, it would be the **same**.

Even **as** they traveled that way **together**, in **spite** of the challenges, the hardship and the suffering they'd face, Christ's disciples would sense the **quality** of that rich, full life that was coming.

They'd sense its abundance overflowing the future, spilling back into their lives.

They would **sense** it in the **pleasure** they'd feel being on the road with Jesus...

in the **satisfaction** they'd feel while helping him work;

in the **reassurance** they'd feel whenever they shared a meal or prayed with him;

in the **consolation** that would come when they suffered along with him and for his sake;

and in the **joy** they'd feel while worshipping the Living God.

They would sense it. And **you and I** – don't we sense it, too, as we follow in our Savior's way?

Satisfaction. Reassurance. Consolation. Joy!

*In **this** world, you **have** tribulation – **indeed!** But, be of good cheer – I have **overcome** the world! Come along, and come over **with** me!*

His disciples sense... they **know as they go**... that they are following their Master **into Life... abundant Life**...

as long as they **are** following him... not ignoring him... not hindering him... but following him...

as **long** as they're **behind** him.

Are **you** behind him now? Are you **following** Christ, your leader?

Are you staying out of his way... and are you in his way?

Well, friends, here at Towson Presbyterian – it seems that Christ **is** leading you... that you're on your way **together** to something new.

Your Lord is **taking** you where **he** wants you to go... to become, along with Rob and Joel, what **he** intends for you to become... to do what God needs you to do for his sake in this community.

I sense that you're energized and grateful and hopeful as you engage with Christ's help in a vigorous ministry;

Maybe you're becoming the **angels** he promised he'd be bringing with him one day.

You're not angels yet. (Well, a few of you might be!)

But surely there are tendencies... there is promise!

And Christ is a **most** capable, winsome and loving leader!

So I do not doubt but that, one day, I shall see you in that light.

I have **reason** to hope so! And so do **all** of you.

Finally, as we prepare to move toward celebrating Holy Communion with our Lord, I want to circle back to the Epistle lesson paired with the gospel for this day.

I'd like us to hear once more Paul's good guidance, God's life-giving counsel for disciples like us:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;

love one another with mutual affection;

outdo one another in showing honour.

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

As those to whom Christ has extended holy hospitality, you and I have much to celebrate, much to receive and much to offer as we follow in his way.

Thanks be to God for that!

Out of His Way and In His Way
Romans 12:9-21 and Matthew 16:21-28
Towson PC 3 September 2017
Rev. William Nickels

Preface

As we prepare to listen to a portion of Matthew's gospel this morning, I want to set the scene for you... particularly any of you who were not here last Sunday when Joel focused on the preceding verses.

If you **were** here (and if you were listening!), you know that at this point in the story, Jesus and the disciples are out on the road together...

preaching and teaching and feeding and healing and **challenging** people by telling them that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near... that it was even **then upon** them.

And the people are wondering just who Jesus is?

Elijah, perhaps? Or Jeremiah? Or one of the **other** prophets?

Or, maybe John the Baptist... who'd somehow been raised from the dead and was back at work?

All kinds of **possibilities** are being floated by folks.

*But, Jesus asks his disciples, **Who do you say that I am?***

For a time, I imagine, everything went silent as words started forming in the minds of Christ's followers.

You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, Simon Peter finally offers.

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah – for my Father himself has revealed this to you.

Now, reading from Matthew, Chapter 16, beginning at verse 21 –

From that time on, Jesus began to **show** his disciples that he must **go to Jerusalem** and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and **be killed**, and on the third day **be raised**.

And Peter **took him** aside and began to rebuke him, saying, *God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you!*

But he turned and said to Peter, *Get **behind** me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.*

Then Jesus told his disciples, *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*

For the word of God in scripture,
for the word of God among us,
for the word of God within us,
Thanks be to God.

Jesus began to show Peter and the other disciples that he must go... go to **Jerusalem**... and **undergo** great suffering... and be killed... and on the third day be raised.

He began to **show** them.

Now, to be honest, we don't know **what** that **means**, exactly.

Matthew didn't say that Jesus began to **tell** them he had to go, but rather, that he started to **show** them.

So it had to involve something **more** than speech.

I think he must have done something physical, like turning in the **direction** of Jerusalem and heading **off** that way...

maybe **pantomiming** suffering... and dying... and maybe even being resurrected.

Whatever it was, it's not spelled out.

But, whatever he **did**, we know that it moved Peter **profoundly** and **physically**.

We **know** this... because we're told that Peter **took** Jesus. He took Jesus **aside**... and rebuked him.

Now I **picture** that strong-armed fisherman jumping up in **front** of Jesus, grabbing him and then pushing him back and off the road, while declaring, *This must never happen to you!*

It's an image of a follower **asserting authority** over a leader, taking **control**... or **trying** to... a kind of a *coupe*.

But Jesus would have none of it. **Turning** away from Peter, he said, *Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me, here... standing in my way.*

Christ had somewhere to **go**, somewhere he knew he **must** go –

I must go to Jerusalem, and suffer, and be killed, and be raised.

And he would not allow anyone to hinder him as he went that way.

Peter **tried** to... putting up some **resistance**.

So, Jesus put Peter **in his place** – put him back **behind** him.

A **disciple's** proper **place**, we are shown, is **behind** Jesus.

Now, *disciple* is a word many of us would use in describing ourselves.

So, let me ask **you** now, are you **behind** Jesus?

Are you letting him lead you? Are you accepting his direction?

Are you listening **consciously** for his voice, his call, his instruction?

Are you responding to him faithfully, **following** as he goes?

Or, are **you** jumping up in front of him and blocking his way?

Are you **preventing** him from proceeding on the path he has chosen... **hindering** him from **taking you** where he wants and needs you to be?

Are you saying things like:

*Now, wait a minute, Jesus. How about letting **me** lead. I **know** where we need to go. I know where we ought to be heading.*

And, I know how to get us there without all this suffering and conflict and effort. My God, who wants that? Who needs that? Not you. Not me!

*Let **me** lead, Jesus. Let me take the **wheel**. I know a better road to steer us down than the one **you've** chosen.*

I know a smoother road, an easier way we can go than the one you're proposing - OK?

Maybe, like Peter, we **have** at times gotten up in **front** of Jesus to block the way, to **turn** him from the course he's set.

Or, maybe you're **considering** doing it **now**... in light of where he seems to be leading you, personally... or where it looks like he's taking this community of faith.

Well, I've a hunch that **our** Lord's not likely to allow **any** one to hinder him for **long**. He certainly didn't let Peter.

*Get **behind** me*, he said with that voice of **command**.

(And you can be **sure** that's **just** what Peter **did**!)

*Get **behind** me*, he calls out now to us, commanding and urging **us**, as well. *And follow... follow **me**... your **Lord**.*

Honestly, friend – are you man, woman or child **enough** to **refuse** him?

He has so **much** authority; and he is so faithful, and wise, and so full of **love** for us; and he is so trustworthy – like no one else in the whole wide world.

Why ever **would** we **refuse** him?

Well, at any rate, soon **enough**, that day, Christ **was** on his way.

He'd made it pretty **clear** that, while it was a way that would cost him dearly, it would, in the **end**, bring him **into life**...

into resurrection life... life in **all** fullness...

life in comparison to which the suffering would be as nothing.

And for everyone who followed him, it would be the **same**.

Even **as** they traveled that way **together**, in **spite** of the challenges, the hardship and the suffering they'd face, Christ's disciples would sense the **quality** of that rich, full life that was coming.

They'd sense its abundance overflowing the future, spilling back into their lives.

They would **sense** it in the **pleasure** they'd feel being on the road with Jesus...

in the **satisfaction** they'd feel while helping him work;

in the **reassurance** they'd feel whenever they shared a meal or prayed with him;

in the **consolation** that would come when they suffered along with him and for his sake;

and in the **joy** they'd feel while worshipping the Living God.

They would sense it. And **you and I** – don't we sense it, too, as we follow in our Savior's way?

Satisfaction. Reassurance. Consolation. Joy!

*In **this** world, you **have** tribulation – **indeed!** But, be of good cheer – I have **overcome** the world! Come along, and come over **with** me!*

His disciples sense... they **know as they go**... that they are following their Master **into Life... abundant Life**...

as long as they **are** following him... not ignoring him... not hindering him... but following him...

as **long** as they're **behind** him.

Are **you** behind him now? Are you **following** Christ, your leader?

Are you staying out of his way... and are you in his way?

Well, friends, here at Towson Presbyterian – it seems that Christ **is** leading you... that you're on your way **together** to something new.

Your Lord is **taking** you where **he** wants you to go... to become, along with Rob and Joel, what **he** intends for you to become... to do what God needs you to do for his sake in this community.

I sense that you're energized and grateful and hopeful as you engage with Christ's help in a vigorous ministry;

Maybe you're becoming the **angels** he promised he'd be bringing with him one day.

You're not angels yet. (Well, a few of you might be!)

But surely there are tendencies... there is promise!

And Christ is a **most** capable, winsome and loving leader!

So I do not doubt but that, one day, I shall see you in that light.

I have **reason** to hope so! And so do **all** of you.

Finally, as we prepare to move toward celebrating Holy Communion with our Lord, I want to circle back to the Epistle lesson paired with the gospel for this day.

I'd like us to hear once more Paul's good guidance, God's life-giving counsel for disciples like us:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;

love one another with mutual affection;

outdo one another in showing honour.

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

As those to whom Christ has extended holy hospitality, you and I have much to celebrate, much to receive and much to offer as we follow in his way.

Thanks be to God for that!

Out of His Way and In His Way
Romans 12:9-21 and Matthew 16:21-28
Towson PC 3 September 2017
Rev. William Nickels

Preface

As we prepare to listen to a portion of Matthew's gospel this morning, I want to set the scene for you... particularly any of you who were not here last Sunday when Joel focused on the preceding verses.

If you **were** here (and if you were listening!), you know that at this point in the story, Jesus and the disciples are out on the road together...

preaching and teaching and feeding and healing and **challenging** people by telling them that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near... that it was even **then upon** them.

And the people are wondering just who Jesus is?

Elijah, perhaps? Or Jeremiah? Or one of the **other** prophets?

Or, maybe John the Baptist... who'd somehow been raised from the dead and was back at work?

All kinds of **possibilities** are being floated by folks.

*But, Jesus asks his disciples, **Who do you say that I am?***

For a time, I imagine, everything went silent as words started forming in the minds of Christ's followers.

You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, Simon Peter finally offers.

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah – for my Father himself has revealed this to you.

Now, reading from Matthew, Chapter 16, beginning at verse 21 –

From that time on, Jesus began to **show** his disciples that he must **go to Jerusalem** and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and **be killed**, and on the third day **be raised**.

And Peter **took him** aside and began to rebuke him, saying, *God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you!*

But he turned and said to Peter, *Get **behind** me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.*

Then Jesus told his disciples, *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*

For the word of God in scripture,
for the word of God among us,
for the word of God within us,
Thanks be to God.

Jesus began to show Peter and the other disciples that he must go... go to **Jerusalem**... and **undergo** great suffering... and be killed... and on the third day be raised.

He began to **show** them.

Now, to be honest, we don't know **what** that **means**, exactly.

Matthew didn't say that Jesus began to **tell** them he had to go, but rather, that he started to **show** them.

So it had to involve something **more** than speech.

I think he must have done something physical, like turning in the **direction** of Jerusalem and heading **off** that way...

maybe **pantomiming** suffering... and dying... and maybe even being resurrected.

Whatever it was, it's not spelled out.

But, whatever he **did**, we know that it moved Peter **profoundly** and **physically**.

We **know** this... because we're told that Peter **took** Jesus. He took Jesus **aside**... and rebuked him.

Now I **picture** that strong-armed fisherman jumping up in **front** of Jesus, grabbing him and then pushing him back and off the road, while declaring, *This must never happen to you!*

It's an image of a follower **asserting authority** over a leader, taking **control**... or **trying** to... a kind of a *coupe*.

But Jesus would have none of it. **Turning** away from Peter, he said, *Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me, here... standing in my way.*

Christ had somewhere to **go**, somewhere he knew he **must** go –

I must go to Jerusalem, and suffer, and be killed, and be raised.

And he would not allow anyone to hinder him as he went that way.

Peter **tried** to... putting up some **resistance**.

So, Jesus put Peter **in his place** – put him back **behind** him.

A **disciple's** proper **place**, we are shown, is **behind** Jesus.

Now, *disciple* is a word many of us would use in describing ourselves.

So, let me ask **you** now, are you **behind** Jesus?

Are you letting him lead you? Are you accepting his direction?

Are you listening **consciously** for his voice, his call, his instruction?

Are you responding to him faithfully, **following** as he goes?

Or, are **you** jumping up in front of him and blocking his way?

Are you **preventing** him from proceeding on the path he has chosen... **hindering** him from **taking you** where he wants and needs you to be?

Are you saying things like:

*Now, wait a minute, Jesus. How about letting **me** lead. I **know** where we need to go. I know where we ought to be heading.*

And, I know how to get us there without all this suffering and conflict and effort. My God, who wants that? Who needs that? Not you. Not me!

*Let **me** lead, Jesus. Let me take the **wheel**. I know a better road to steer us down than the one **you've** chosen.*

I know a smoother road, an easier way we can go than the one you're proposing - OK?

Maybe, like Peter, we **have** at times gotten up in **front** of Jesus to block the way, to **turn** him from the course he's set.

Or, maybe you're **considering** doing it **now**... in light of where he seems to be leading you, personally... or where it looks like he's taking this community of faith.

Well, I've a hunch that **our** Lord's not likely to allow **any** one to hinder him for **long**. He certainly didn't let Peter.

*Get **behind** me*, he said with that voice of **command**.

(And you can be **sure** that's **just** what Peter **did**!)

*Get **behind** me*, he calls out now to us, commanding and urging **us**, as well. *And follow... follow **me**... your **Lord**.*

Honestly, friend – are you man, woman or child **enough** to **refuse** him?

He has so **much** authority; and he is so faithful, and wise, and so full of **love** for us; and he is so trustworthy – like no one else in the whole wide world.

Why ever **would** we **refuse** him?

Well, at any rate, soon **enough**, that day, Christ **was** on his way.

He'd made it pretty **clear** that, while it was a way that would cost him dearly, it would, in the **end**, bring him **into life**...

into resurrection life... life in **all** fullness...

life in comparison to which the suffering would be as nothing.

And for everyone who followed him, it would be the **same**.

Even **as** they traveled that way **together**, in **spite** of the challenges, the hardship and the suffering they'd face, Christ's disciples would sense the **quality** of that rich, full life that was coming.

They'd sense its abundance overflowing the future, spilling back into their lives.

They would **sense** it in the **pleasure** they'd feel being on the road with Jesus...

in the **satisfaction** they'd feel while helping him work;

in the **reassurance** they'd feel whenever they shared a meal or prayed with him;

in the **consolation** that would come when they suffered along with him and for his sake;

and in the **joy** they'd feel while worshipping the Living God.

They would sense it. And **you and I** – don't we sense it, too, as we follow in our Savior's way?

Satisfaction. Reassurance. Consolation. Joy!

*In **this** world, you **have** tribulation – **indeed!** But, be of good cheer – I have **overcome** the world! Come along, and come over **with** me!*

His disciples sense... they **know as they go**... that they are following their Master **into Life... abundant Life**...

as long as they **are** following him... not ignoring him... not hindering him... but following him...

as **long** as they're **behind** him.

Are **you** behind him now? Are you **following** Christ, your leader?

Are you staying out of his way... and are you in his way?

Well, friends, here at Towson Presbyterian – it seems that Christ **is** leading you... that you're on your way **together** to something new.

Your Lord is **taking** you where **he** wants you to go... to become, along with Rob and Joel, what **he** intends for you to become... to do what God needs you to do for his sake in this community.

I sense that you're energized and grateful and hopeful as you engage with Christ's help in a vigorous ministry;

Maybe you're becoming the **angels** he promised he'd be bringing with him one day.

You're not angels yet. (Well, a few of you might be!)

But surely there are tendencies... there is promise!

And Christ is a **most** capable, winsome and loving leader!

So I do not doubt but that, one day, I shall see you in that light.

I have **reason** to hope so! And so do **all** of you.

Finally, as we prepare to move toward celebrating Holy Communion with our Lord, I want to circle back to the Epistle lesson paired with the gospel for this day.

I'd like us to hear once more Paul's good guidance, God's life-giving counsel for disciples like us:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;

love one another with mutual affection;

outdo one another in showing honour.

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

As those to whom Christ has extended holy hospitality, you and I have much to celebrate, much to receive and much to offer as we follow in his way.

Thanks be to God for that!

Out of His Way and In His Way
Romans 12:9-21 and Matthew 16:21-28
Towson PC 3 September 2017
Rev. William Nickels

Preface

As we prepare to listen to a portion of Matthew's gospel this morning, I want to set the scene for you... particularly any of you who were not here last Sunday when Joel focused on the preceding verses.

If you **were** here (and if you were listening!), you know that at this point in the story, Jesus and the disciples are out on the road together...

preaching and teaching and feeding and healing and **challenging** people by telling them that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near... that it was even **then upon** them.

And the people are wondering just who Jesus is?

Elijah, perhaps? Or Jeremiah? Or one of the **other** prophets?

Or, maybe John the Baptist... who'd somehow been raised from the dead and was back at work?

All kinds of **possibilities** are being floated by folks.

*But, Jesus asks his disciples, **Who do you say that I am?***

For a time, I imagine, everything went silent as words started forming in the minds of Christ's followers.

You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, Simon Peter finally offers.

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah – for my Father himself has revealed this to you.

Now, reading from Matthew, Chapter 16, beginning at verse 21 –

From that time on, Jesus began to **show** his disciples that he must **go to Jerusalem** and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and **be killed**, and on the third day **be raised**.

And Peter **took him** aside and began to rebuke him, saying, *God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you!*

But he turned and said to Peter, *Get **behind** me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.*

Then Jesus told his disciples, *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*

For the word of God in scripture,
for the word of God among us,
for the word of God within us,
Thanks be to God.

Jesus began to show Peter and the other disciples that he must go... go to **Jerusalem**... and **undergo** great suffering... and be killed... and on the third day be raised.

He began to **show** them.

Now, to be honest, we don't know **what** that **means**, exactly.

Matthew didn't say that Jesus began to **tell** them he had to go, but rather, that he started to **show** them.

So it had to involve something **more** than speech.

I think he must have done something physical, like turning in the **direction** of Jerusalem and heading **off** that way...

maybe **pantomiming** suffering... and dying... and maybe even being resurrected.

Whatever it was, it's not spelled out.

But, whatever he **did**, we know that it moved Peter **profoundly** and **physically**.

We **know** this... because we're told that Peter **took** Jesus. He took Jesus **aside**... and rebuked him.

Now I **picture** that strong-armed fisherman jumping up in **front** of Jesus, grabbing him and then pushing him back and off the road, while declaring, *This must never happen to you!*

It's an image of a follower **asserting authority** over a leader, taking **control**... or **trying** to... a kind of a coupe.

But Jesus would have none of it. **Turning** away from Peter, he said, *Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me, here... standing in my way.*

Christ had somewhere to **go**, somewhere he knew he **must** go –

I must go to Jerusalem, and suffer, and be killed, and be raised.

And he would not allow anyone to hinder him as he went that way.

Peter **tried** to... putting up some **resistance**.

So, Jesus put Peter **in his place** – put him back **behind** him.

A **disciple's** proper **place**, we are shown, is **behind** Jesus.

Now, *disciple* is a word many of us would use in describing ourselves.

So, let me ask **you** now, are you **behind** Jesus?

Are you letting him lead you? Are you accepting his direction?

Are you listening **consciously** for his voice, his call, his instruction?

Are you responding to him faithfully, **following** as he goes?

Or, are **you** jumping up in front of him and blocking his way?

Are you **preventing** him from proceeding on the path he has chosen... **hindering** him from **taking you** where he wants and needs you to be?

Are you saying things like:

*Now, wait a minute, Jesus. How about letting **me** lead. I **know** where we need to go. I know where we ought to be heading.*

And, I know how to get us there without all this suffering and conflict and effort. My God, who wants that? Who needs that? Not you. Not me!

*Let **me** lead, Jesus. Let me take the **wheel**. I know a better road to steer us down than the one **you've** chosen.*

I know a smoother road, an easier way we can go than the one you're proposing - OK?

Maybe, like Peter, we **have** at times gotten up in **front** of Jesus to block the way, to **turn** him from the course he's set.

Or, maybe you're **considering** doing it **now**... in light of where he seems to be leading you, personally... or where it looks like he's taking this community of faith.

Well, I've a hunch that **our** Lord's not likely to allow **any** one to hinder him for **long**. He certainly didn't let Peter.

*Get **behind** me*, he said with that voice of **command**.

(And you can be **sure** that's **just** what Peter **did**!)

*Get **behind** me*, he calls out now to us, commanding and urging **us**, as well. *And follow... follow **me**... your **Lord**.*

Honestly, friend – are you man, woman or child **enough** to **refuse** him?

He has so **much** authority; and he is so faithful, and wise, and so full of **love** for us; and he is so trustworthy – like no one else in the whole wide world.

Why ever **would** we **refuse** him?

Well, at any rate, soon **enough**, that day, Christ **was** on his way.

He'd made it pretty **clear** that, while it was a way that would cost him dearly, it would, in the **end**, bring him **into life**...

into resurrection life... life in **all** fullness...

life in comparison to which the suffering would be as nothing.

And for everyone who followed him, it would be the **same**.

Even **as** they traveled that way **together**, in **spite** of the challenges, the hardship and the suffering they'd face, Christ's disciples would sense the **quality** of that rich, full life that was coming.

They'd sense its abundance overflowing the future, spilling back into their lives.

They would **sense** it in the **pleasure** they'd feel being on the road with Jesus...

in the **satisfaction** they'd feel while helping him work;

in the **reassurance** they'd feel whenever they shared a meal or prayed with him;

in the **consolation** that would come when they suffered along with him and for his sake;

and in the **joy** they'd feel while worshipping the Living God.

They would sense it. And **you and I** – don't we sense it, too, as we follow in our Savior's way?

Satisfaction. Reassurance. Consolation. Joy!

*In **this** world, you **have** tribulation – **indeed!** But, be of good cheer – I have **overcome** the world! Come along, and come over **with** me!*

His disciples sense... they **know as they go**... that they are following their Master **into Life... abundant Life**...

as long as they **are** following him... not ignoring him... not hindering him... but following him...

as **long** as they're **behind** him.

Are **you** behind him now? Are you **following** Christ, your leader?

Are you staying out of his way... and are you in his way?

Well, friends, here at Towson Presbyterian – it seems that Christ **is** leading you... that you're on your way **together** to something new.

Your Lord is **taking** you where **he** wants you to go... to become, along with Rob and Joel, what **he** intends for you to become... to do what God needs you to do for his sake in this community.

I sense that you're energized and grateful and hopeful as you engage with Christ's help in a vigorous ministry;

Maybe you're becoming the **angels** he promised he'd be bringing with him one day.

You're not angels yet. (Well, a few of you might be!)

But surely there are tendencies... there is promise!

And Christ is a **most** capable, winsome and loving leader!

So I do not doubt but that, one day, I shall see you in that light.

I have **reason** to hope so! And so do **all** of you.

Finally, as we prepare to move toward celebrating Holy Communion with our Lord, I want to circle back to the Epistle lesson paired with the gospel for this day.

I'd like us to hear once more Paul's good guidance, God's life-giving counsel for disciples like us:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;

love one another with mutual affection;

outdo one another in showing honour.

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

As those to whom Christ has extended holy hospitality, you and I have much to celebrate, much to receive and much to offer as we follow in his way.

Thanks be to God for that!

Out of His Way and In His Way
Romans 12:9-21 and Matthew 16:21-28
Towson PC 3 September 2017
Rev. William Nickels

Preface

As we prepare to listen to a portion of Matthew's gospel this morning, I want to set the scene for you... particularly any of you who were not here last Sunday when Joel focused on the preceding verses.

If you **were** here (and if you were listening!), you know that at this point in the story, Jesus and the disciples are out on the road together...

preaching and teaching and feeding and healing and **challenging** people by telling them that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near... that it was even **then upon** them.

And the people are wondering just who Jesus is?

Elijah, perhaps? Or Jeremiah? Or one of the **other** prophets?

Or, maybe John the Baptist... who'd somehow been raised from the dead and was back at work?

All kinds of **possibilities** are being floated by folks.

*But, Jesus asks his disciples, **Who do you say that I am?***

For a time, I imagine, everything went silent as words started forming in the minds of Christ's followers.

You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, Simon Peter finally offers.

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah – for my Father himself has revealed this to you.

Now, reading from Matthew, Chapter 16, beginning at verse 21 –

From that time on, Jesus began to **show** his disciples that he must **go to Jerusalem** and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and **be killed**, and on the third day **be raised**.

And Peter **took him** aside and began to rebuke him, saying, *God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you!*

But he turned and said to Peter, *Get **behind** me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.*

Then Jesus told his disciples, *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*

For the word of God in scripture,
for the word of God among us,
for the word of God within us,
Thanks be to God.

Jesus began to show Peter and the other disciples that he must go... go to **Jerusalem**... and **undergo** great suffering... and be killed... and on the third day be raised.

He began to **show** them.

Now, to be honest, we don't know **what** that **means**, exactly.

Matthew didn't say that Jesus began to **tell** them he had to go, but rather, that he started to **show** them.

So it had to involve something **more** than speech.

I think he must have done something physical, like turning in the **direction** of Jerusalem and heading **off** that way...

maybe **pantomiming** suffering... and dying... and maybe even being resurrected.

Whatever it was, it's not spelled out.

But, whatever he **did**, we know that it moved Peter **profoundly** and **physically**.

We **know** this... because we're told that Peter **took** Jesus. He took Jesus **aside**... and rebuked him.

Now I **picture** that strong-armed fisherman jumping up in **front** of Jesus, grabbing him and then pushing him back and off the road, while declaring, *This must never happen to you!*

It's an image of a follower **asserting authority** over a leader, taking **control**... or **trying** to... a kind of a *coupe*.

But Jesus would have none of it. **Turning** away from Peter, he said, *Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me, here... standing in my way.*

Christ had somewhere to **go**, somewhere he knew he **must** go –

I must go to Jerusalem, and suffer, and be killed, and be raised.

And he would not allow anyone to hinder him as he went that way.

Peter **tried** to... putting up some **resistance**.

So, Jesus put Peter **in his place** – put him back **behind** him.

A **disciple's** proper **place**, we are shown, is **behind** Jesus.

Now, *disciple* is a word many of us would use in describing ourselves.

So, let me ask **you** now, are you **behind** Jesus?

Are you letting him lead you? Are you accepting his direction?

Are you listening **consciously** for his voice, his call, his instruction?

Are you responding to him faithfully, **following** as he goes?

Or, are **you** jumping up in front of him and blocking his way?

Are you **preventing** him from proceeding on the path he has chosen... **hindering** him from **taking you** where he wants and needs you to be?

Are you saying things like:

*Now, wait a minute, Jesus. How about letting **me** lead. I **know** where we need to go. I know where we ought to be heading.*

And, I know how to get us there without all this suffering and conflict and effort. My God, who wants that? Who needs that? Not you. Not me!

*Let **me** lead, Jesus. Let me take the **wheel**. I know a better road to steer us down than the one **you've** chosen.*

I know a smoother road, an easier way we can go than the one you're proposing - OK?

Maybe, like Peter, we **have** at times gotten up in **front** of Jesus to block the way, to **turn** him from the course he's set.

Or, maybe you're **considering** doing it **now**... in light of where he seems to be leading you, personally... or where it looks like he's taking this community of faith.

Well, I've a hunch that **our** Lord's not likely to allow **any** one to hinder him for **long**. He certainly didn't let Peter.

*Get **behind** me*, he said with that voice of **command**.

(And you can be **sure** that's **just** what Peter **did**!)

*Get **behind** me*, he calls out now to us, commanding and urging **us**, as well. *And follow... follow **me**... your **Lord**.*

Honestly, friend – are you man, woman or child **enough** to **refuse** him?

He has so **much** authority; and he is so faithful, and wise, and so full of **love** for us; and he is so trustworthy – like no one else in the whole wide world.

Why ever **would** we **refuse** him?

Well, at any rate, soon **enough**, that day, Christ **was** on his way.

He'd made it pretty **clear** that, while it was a way that would cost him dearly, it would, in the **end**, bring him **into life**...

into resurrection life... life in **all** fullness...

life in comparison to which the suffering would be as nothing.

And for everyone who followed him, it would be the **same**.

Even **as** they traveled that way **together**, in **spite** of the challenges, the hardship and the suffering they'd face, Christ's disciples would sense the **quality** of that rich, full life that was coming.

They'd sense its abundance overflowing the future, spilling back into their lives.

They would **sense** it in the **pleasure** they'd feel being on the road with Jesus...

in the **satisfaction** they'd feel while helping him work;

in the **reassurance** they'd feel whenever they shared a meal or prayed with him;

in the **consolation** that would come when they suffered along with him and for his sake;

and in the **joy** they'd feel while worshipping the Living God.

They would sense it. And **you and I** – don't we sense it, too, as we follow in our Savior's way?

Satisfaction. Reassurance. Consolation. Joy!

*In **this** world, you **have** tribulation – **indeed!** But, be of good cheer – I have **overcome** the world! Come along, and come over **with** me!*

His disciples sense... they **know as they go**... that they are following their Master **into Life... abundant Life**...

as long as they **are** following him... not ignoring him... not hindering him... but following him...

as **long** as they're **behind** him.

Are **you** behind him now? Are you **following** Christ, your leader?

Are you staying out of his way... and are you in his way?

Well, friends, here at Towson Presbyterian – it seems that Christ **is** leading you... that you're on your way **together** to something new.

Your Lord is **taking** you where **he** wants you to go... to become, along with Rob and Joel, what **he** intends for you to become... to do what God needs you to do for his sake in this community.

I sense that you're energized and grateful and hopeful as you engage with Christ's help in a vigorous ministry;

Maybe you're becoming the **angels** he promised he'd be bringing with him one day.

You're not angels yet. (Well, a few of you might be!)

But surely there are tendencies... there is promise!

And Christ is a **most** capable, winsome and loving leader!

So I do not doubt but that, one day, I shall see you in that light.

I have **reason** to hope so! And so do **all** of you.

Finally, as we prepare to move toward celebrating Holy Communion with our Lord, I want to circle back to the Epistle lesson paired with the gospel for this day.

I'd like us to hear once more Paul's good guidance, God's life-giving counsel for disciples like us:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;

love one another with mutual affection;

outdo one another in showing honour.

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

As those to whom Christ has extended holy hospitality, you and I have much to celebrate, much to receive and much to offer as we follow in his way.

Thanks be to God for that!

Out of His Way and In His Way
Romans 12:9-21 and Matthew 16:21-28
Towson PC 3 September 2017
Rev. William Nickels

Preface

As we prepare to listen to a portion of Matthew's gospel this morning, I want to set the scene for you... particularly any of you who were not here last Sunday when Joel focused on the preceding verses.

If you **were** here (and if you were listening!), you know that at this point in the story, Jesus and the disciples are out on the road together...

preaching and teaching and feeding and healing and **challenging** people by telling them that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near... that it was even **then upon** them.

And the people are wondering just who Jesus is?

Elijah, perhaps? Or Jeremiah? Or one of the **other** prophets?

Or, maybe John the Baptist... who'd somehow been raised from the dead and was back at work?

All kinds of **possibilities** are being floated by folks.

But, Jesus asks his disciples, *Who do **you** say that I am?*

For a time, I imagine, everything went silent as words started forming in the minds of Christ's followers.

You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, Simon Peter finally offers.

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah – for my Father himself has revealed this to you.

Now, reading from Matthew, Chapter 16, beginning at verse 21 –

From that time on, Jesus began to **show** his disciples that he must **go to Jerusalem** and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and **be killed**, and on the third day **be raised**.

And Peter **took him** aside and began to rebuke him, saying, *God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you!*

But he turned and said to Peter, *Get **behind** me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.*

Then Jesus told his disciples, *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*

For the word of God in scripture,
for the word of God among us,
for the word of God within us,
Thanks be to God.

Jesus began to show Peter and the other disciples that he must go... go to **Jerusalem**... and **undergo** great suffering... and be killed... and on the third day be raised.

He began to **show** them.

Now, to be honest, we don't know **what** that **means**, exactly.

Matthew didn't say that Jesus began to **tell** them he had to go, but rather, that he started to **show** them.

So it had to involve something **more** than speech.

I think he must have done something physical, like turning in the **direction** of Jerusalem and heading **off** that way...

maybe **pantomiming** suffering... and dying... and maybe even being resurrected.

Whatever it was, it's not spelled out.

But, whatever he **did**, we know that it moved Peter **profoundly** and **physically**.

We **know** this... because we're told that Peter **took** Jesus. He took Jesus **aside**... and rebuked him.

Now I **picture** that strong-armed fisherman jumping up in **front** of Jesus, grabbing him and then pushing him back and off the road, while declaring, *This must never happen to you!*

It's an image of a follower **asserting authority** over a leader, taking **control**... or **trying** to... a kind of a *coupe*.

But Jesus would have none of it. **Turning** away from Peter, he said, *Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me, here... standing in my way.*

Christ had somewhere to **go**, somewhere he knew he **must** go –

I must go to Jerusalem, and suffer, and be killed, and be raised.

And he would not allow anyone to hinder him as he went that way.

Peter **tried** to... putting up some **resistance**.

So, Jesus put Peter **in his place** – put him back **behind** him.

A **disciple's** proper **place**, we are shown, is **behind** Jesus.

Now, *disciple* is a word many of us would use in describing ourselves.

So, let me ask **you** now, are you **behind** Jesus?

Are you letting him lead you? Are you accepting his direction?

Are you listening **consciously** for his voice, his call, his instruction?

Are you responding to him faithfully, **following** as he goes?

Or, are **you** jumping up in front of him and blocking his way?

Are you **preventing** him from proceeding on the path he has chosen... **hindering** him from **taking you** where he wants and needs you to be?

Are you saying things like:

*Now, wait a minute, Jesus. How about letting **me** lead. I **know** where we need to go. I know where we ought to be heading.*

And, I know how to get us there without all this suffering and conflict and effort. My God, who wants that? Who needs that? Not you. Not me!

*Let **me** lead, Jesus. Let me take the **wheel**. I know a better road to steer us down than the one **you've** chosen.*

I know a smoother road, an easier way we can go than the one you're proposing - OK?

Maybe, like Peter, we **have** at times gotten up in **front** of Jesus to block the way, to **turn** him from the course he's set.

Or, maybe you're **considering** doing it **now**... in light of where he seems to be leading you, personally... or where it looks like he's taking this community of faith.

Well, I've a hunch that **our** Lord's not likely to allow **any** one to hinder him for **long**. He certainly didn't let Peter.

*Get **behind** me*, he said with that voice of **command**.

(And you can be **sure** that's **just** what Peter **did**!)

*Get **behind** me*, he calls out now to us, commanding and urging **us**, as well. *And follow... follow **me**... your **Lord**.*

Honestly, friend – are you man, woman or child **enough** to **refuse** him?

He has so **much** authority; and he is so faithful, and wise, and so full of **love** for us; and he is so trustworthy – like no one else in the whole wide world.

Why ever **would** we **refuse** him?

Well, at any rate, soon **enough**, that day, Christ **was** on his way.

He'd made it pretty **clear** that, while it was a way that would cost him dearly, it would, in the **end**, bring him **into life**...

into resurrection life... life in **all** fullness...

life in comparison to which the suffering would be as nothing.

And for everyone who followed him, it would be the **same**.

Even **as** they traveled that way **together**, in **spite** of the challenges, the hardship and the suffering they'd face, Christ's disciples would sense the **quality** of that rich, full life that was coming.

They'd sense its abundance overflowing the future, spilling back into their lives.

They would **sense** it in the **pleasure** they'd feel being on the road with Jesus...

in the **satisfaction** they'd feel while helping him work;

in the **reassurance** they'd feel whenever they shared a meal or prayed with him;

in the **consolation** that would come when they suffered along with him and for his sake;

and in the **joy** they'd feel while worshipping the Living God.

They would sense it. And **you and I** – don't we sense it, too, as we follow in our Savior's way?

Satisfaction. Reassurance. Consolation. Joy!

*In **this** world, you **have** tribulation – **indeed!** But, be of good cheer – I have **overcome** the world! Come along, and come over **with** me!*

His disciples sense... they **know as they go**... that they are following their Master **into Life... abundant Life**...

as long as they **are** following him... not ignoring him... not hindering him... but following him...

as **long** as they're **behind** him.

Are **you** behind him now? Are you **following** Christ, your leader?

Are you staying out of his way... and are you in his way?

Well, friends, here at Towson Presbyterian – it seems that Christ **is** leading you... that you're on your way **together** to something new.

Your Lord is **taking** you where **he** wants you to go... to become, along with Rob and Joel, what **he** intends for you to become... to do what God needs you to do for his sake in this community.

I sense that you're energized and grateful and hopeful as you engage with Christ's help in a vigorous ministry;

Maybe you're becoming the **angels** he promised he'd be bringing with him one day.

You're not angels yet. (Well, a few of you might be!)

But surely there are tendencies... there is promise!

And Christ is a **most** capable, winsome and loving leader!

So I do not doubt but that, one day, I shall see you in that light.

I have **reason** to hope so! And so do **all** of you.

Finally, as we prepare to move toward celebrating Holy Communion with our Lord, I want to circle back to the Epistle lesson paired with the gospel for this day.

I'd like us to hear once more Paul's good guidance, God's life-giving counsel for disciples like us:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;

love one another with mutual affection;

outdo one another in showing honour.

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

As those to whom Christ has extended holy hospitality, you and I have much to celebrate, much to receive and much to offer as we follow in his way.

Thanks be to God for that!

Out of His Way and In His Way
Romans 12:9-21 and Matthew 16:21-28
Towson PC 3 September 2017
Rev. William Nickels

Preface

As we prepare to listen to a portion of Matthew's gospel this morning, I want to set the scene for you... particularly any of you who were not here last Sunday when Joel focused on the preceding verses.

If you **were** here (and if you were listening!), you know that at this point in the story, Jesus and the disciples are out on the road together...

preaching and teaching and feeding and healing and **challenging** people by telling them that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near... that it was even **then upon** them.

And the people are wondering just who Jesus is?

Elijah, perhaps? Or Jeremiah? Or one of the **other** prophets?

Or, maybe John the Baptist... who'd somehow been raised from the dead and was back at work?

All kinds of **possibilities** are being floated by folks.

*But, Jesus asks his disciples, **Who do you say that I am?***

For a time, I imagine, everything went silent as words started forming in the minds of Christ's followers.

You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, Simon Peter finally offers.

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah – for my Father himself has revealed this to you.

Now, reading from Matthew, Chapter 16, beginning at verse 21 –

From that time on, Jesus began to **show** his disciples that he must **go to Jerusalem** and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and **be killed**, and on the third day **be raised**.

And Peter **took him** aside and began to rebuke him, saying, *God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you!*

But he turned and said to Peter, *Get **behind** me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.*

Then Jesus told his disciples, *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*

For the word of God in scripture,
for the word of God among us,
for the word of God within us,
Thanks be to God.

Jesus began to show Peter and the other disciples that he must go... go to **Jerusalem**... and **undergo** great suffering... and be killed... and on the third day be raised.

He began to **show** them.

Now, to be honest, we don't know **what** that **means**, exactly.

Matthew didn't say that Jesus began to **tell** them he had to go, but rather, that he started to **show** them.

So it had to involve something **more** than speech.

I think he must have done something physical, like turning in the **direction** of Jerusalem and heading **off** that way...

maybe **pantomiming** suffering... and dying... and maybe even being resurrected.

Whatever it was, it's not spelled out.

But, whatever he **did**, we know that it moved Peter **profoundly** and **physically**.

We **know** this... because we're told that Peter **took** Jesus. He took Jesus **aside**... and rebuked him.

Now I **picture** that strong-armed fisherman jumping up in **front** of Jesus, grabbing him and then pushing him back and off the road, while declaring, *This must never happen to you!*

It's an image of a follower **asserting authority** over a leader, taking **control**... or **trying** to... a kind of a *coupe*.

But Jesus would have none of it. **Turning** away from Peter, he said, *Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me, here... standing in my way.*

Christ had somewhere to **go**, somewhere he knew he **must** go –

I must go to Jerusalem, and suffer, and be killed, and be raised.

And he would not allow anyone to hinder him as he went that way.

Peter **tried** to... putting up some **resistance**.

So, Jesus put Peter **in his place** – put him back **behind** him.

A **disciple's** proper **place**, we are shown, is **behind** Jesus.

Now, *disciple* is a word many of us would use in describing ourselves.

So, let me ask **you** now, are you **behind** Jesus?

Are you letting him lead you? Are you accepting his direction?

Are you listening **consciously** for his voice, his call, his instruction?

Are you responding to him faithfully, **following** as he goes?

Or, are **you** jumping up in front of him and blocking his way?

Are you **preventing** him from proceeding on the path he has chosen... **hindering** him from **taking you** where he wants and needs you to be?

Are you saying things like:

*Now, wait a minute, Jesus. How about letting **me** lead. I **know** where we need to go. I know where we ought to be heading.*

And, I know how to get us there without all this suffering and conflict and effort. My God, who wants that? Who needs that? Not you. Not me!

*Let **me** lead, Jesus. Let me take the **wheel**. I know a better road to steer us down than the one **you've** chosen.*

I know a smoother road, an easier way we can go than the one you're proposing - OK?

Maybe, like Peter, we **have** at times gotten up in **front** of Jesus to block the way, to **turn** him from the course he's set.

Or, maybe you're **considering** doing it **now**... in light of where he seems to be leading you, personally... or where it looks like he's taking this community of faith.

Well, I've a hunch that **our** Lord's not likely to allow **any** one to hinder him for **long**. He certainly didn't let Peter.

*Get **behind** me*, he said with that voice of **command**.

(And you can be **sure** that's **just** what Peter **did**!)

*Get **behind** me*, he calls out now to us, commanding and urging **us**, as well. *And follow... follow **me**... your **Lord**.*

Honestly, friend – are you man, woman or child **enough** to **refuse** him?

He has so **much** authority; and he is so faithful, and wise, and so full of **love** for us; and he is so trustworthy – like no one else in the whole wide world.

Why ever **would** we **refuse** him?

Well, at any rate, soon **enough**, that day, Christ **was** on his way.

He'd made it pretty **clear** that, while it was a way that would cost him dearly, it would, in the **end**, bring him **into life**...

into resurrection life... life in **all** fullness...

life in comparison to which the suffering would be as nothing.

And for everyone who followed him, it would be the **same**.

Even **as** they traveled that way **together**, in **spite** of the challenges, the hardship and the suffering they'd face, Christ's disciples would sense the **quality** of that rich, full life that was coming.

They'd sense its abundance overflowing the future, spilling back into their lives.

They would **sense** it in the **pleasure** they'd feel being on the road with Jesus...

in the **satisfaction** they'd feel while helping him work;

in the **reassurance** they'd feel whenever they shared a meal or prayed with him;

in the **consolation** that would come when they suffered along with him and for his sake;

and in the **joy** they'd feel while worshipping the Living God.

They would sense it. And **you and I** – don't we sense it, too, as we follow in our Savior's way?

Satisfaction. Reassurance. Consolation. Joy!

*In **this** world, you **have** tribulation – **indeed!** But, be of good cheer – I have **overcome** the world! Come along, and come over **with** me!*

His disciples sense... they **know as they go**... that they are following their Master **into Life... abundant Life**...

as long as they **are** following him... not ignoring him... not hindering him... but following him...

as **long** as they're **behind** him.

Are **you** behind him now? Are you **following** Christ, your leader?

Are you staying out of his way... and are you in his way?

Well, friends, here at Towson Presbyterian – it seems that Christ **is** leading you... that you're on your way **together** to something new.

Your Lord is **taking** you where **he** wants you to go... to become, along with Rob and Joel, what **he** intends for you to become... to do what God needs you to do for his sake in this community.

I sense that you're energized and grateful and hopeful as you engage with Christ's help in a vigorous ministry;

Maybe you're becoming the **angels** he promised he'd be bringing with him one day.

You're not angels yet. (Well, a few of you might be!)

But surely there are tendencies... there is promise!

And Christ is a **most** capable, winsome and loving leader!

So I do not doubt but that, one day, I shall see you in that light.

I have **reason** to hope so! And so do **all** of you.

Finally, as we prepare to move toward celebrating Holy Communion with our Lord, I want to circle back to the Epistle lesson paired with the gospel for this day.

I'd like us to hear once more Paul's good guidance, God's life-giving counsel for disciples like us:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;

love one another with mutual affection;

outdo one another in showing honour.

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

As those to whom Christ has extended holy hospitality, you and I have much to celebrate, much to receive and much to offer as we follow in his way.

Thanks be to God for that!

Out of His Way and In His Way
Romans 12:9-21 and Matthew 16:21-28
Towson PC 3 September 2017
Rev. William Nickels

Preface

As we prepare to listen to a portion of Matthew's gospel this morning, I want to set the scene for you... particularly any of you who were not here last Sunday when Joel focused on the preceding verses.

If you **were** here (and if you were listening!), you know that at this point in the story, Jesus and the disciples are out on the road together...

preaching and teaching and feeding and healing and **challenging** people by telling them that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near... that it was even **then upon** them.

And the people are wondering just who Jesus is?

Elijah, perhaps? Or Jeremiah? Or one of the **other** prophets?

Or, maybe John the Baptist... who'd somehow been raised from the dead and was back at work?

All kinds of **possibilities** are being floated by folks.

*But, Jesus asks his disciples, **Who do you say that I am?***

For a time, I imagine, everything went silent as words started forming in the minds of Christ's followers.

You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, Simon Peter finally offers.

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah – for my Father himself has revealed this to you.

Now, reading from Matthew, Chapter 16, beginning at verse 21 –

From that time on, Jesus began to **show** his disciples that he must **go to Jerusalem** and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and **be killed**, and on the third day **be raised**.

And Peter **took him** aside and began to rebuke him, saying, *God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you!*

But he turned and said to Peter, *Get **behind** me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.*

Then Jesus told his disciples, *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*

For the word of God in scripture,
for the word of God among us,
for the word of God within us,
Thanks be to God.

Jesus began to show Peter and the other disciples that he must go... go to **Jerusalem**... and **undergo** great suffering... and be killed... and on the third day be raised.

He began to **show** them.

Now, to be honest, we don't know **what** that **means**, exactly.

Matthew didn't say that Jesus began to **tell** them he had to go, but rather, that he started to **show** them.

So it had to involve something **more** than speech.

I think he must have done something physical, like turning in the **direction** of Jerusalem and heading **off** that way...

maybe **pantomiming** suffering... and dying... and maybe even being resurrected.

Whatever it was, it's not spelled out.

But, whatever he **did**, we know that it moved Peter **profoundly** and **physically**.

We **know** this... because we're told that Peter **took** Jesus. He took Jesus **aside**... and rebuked him.

Now I **picture** that strong-armed fisherman jumping up in **front** of Jesus, grabbing him and then pushing him back and off the road, while declaring, *This must never happen to you!*

It's an image of a follower **asserting authority** over a leader, taking **control**... or **trying** to... a kind of a *coupe*.

But Jesus would have none of it. **Turning** away from Peter, he said, *Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me, here... standing in my way.*

Christ had somewhere to **go**, somewhere he knew he **must** go –

I must go to Jerusalem, and suffer, and be killed, and be raised.

And he would not allow anyone to hinder him as he went that way.

Peter **tried** to... putting up some **resistance**.

So, Jesus put Peter **in his place** – put him back **behind** him.

A **disciple's** proper **place**, we are shown, is **behind** Jesus.

Now, *disciple* is a word many of us would use in describing ourselves.

So, let me ask **you** now, are you **behind** Jesus?

Are you letting him lead you? Are you accepting his direction?

Are you listening **consciously** for his voice, his call, his instruction?

Are you responding to him faithfully, **following** as he goes?

Or, are **you** jumping up in front of him and blocking his way?

Are you **preventing** him from proceeding on the path he has chosen... **hindering** him from **taking you** where he wants and needs you to be?

Are you saying things like:

*Now, wait a minute, Jesus. How about letting **me** lead. I **know** where we need to go. I know where we ought to be heading.*

And, I know how to get us there without all this suffering and conflict and effort. My God, who wants that? Who needs that? Not you. Not me!

*Let **me** lead, Jesus. Let me take the **wheel**. I know a better road to steer us down than the one **you've** chosen.*

I know a smoother road, an easier way we can go than the one you're proposing - OK?

Maybe, like Peter, we **have** at times gotten up in **front** of Jesus to block the way, to **turn** him from the course he's set.

Or, maybe you're **considering** doing it **now**... in light of where he seems to be leading you, personally... or where it looks like he's taking this community of faith.

Well, I've a hunch that **our** Lord's not likely to allow **any** one to hinder him for **long**. He certainly didn't let Peter.

*Get **behind** me*, he said with that voice of **command**.

(And you can be **sure** that's **just** what Peter **did**!)

*Get **behind** me*, he calls out now to us, commanding and urging **us**, as well. *And follow... follow **me**... your **Lord**.*

Honestly, friend – are you man, woman or child **enough** to **refuse** him?

He has so **much** authority; and he is so faithful, and wise, and so full of **love** for us; and he is so trustworthy – like no one else in the whole wide world.

Why ever **would** we **refuse** him?

Well, at any rate, soon **enough**, that day, Christ **was** on his way.

He'd made it pretty **clear** that, while it was a way that would cost him dearly, it would, in the **end**, bring him **into life**...

into resurrection life... life in **all** fullness...

life in comparison to which the suffering would be as nothing.

And for everyone who followed him, it would be the **same**.

Even **as** they traveled that way **together**, in **spite** of the challenges, the hardship and the suffering they'd face, Christ's disciples would sense the **quality** of that rich, full life that was coming.

They'd sense its abundance overflowing the future, spilling back into their lives.

They would **sense** it in the **pleasure** they'd feel being on the road with Jesus...

in the **satisfaction** they'd feel while helping him work;

in the **reassurance** they'd feel whenever they shared a meal or prayed with him;

in the **consolation** that would come when they suffered along with him and for his sake;

and in the **joy** they'd feel while worshipping the Living God.

They would sense it. And **you and I** – don't we sense it, too, as we follow in our Savior's way?

Satisfaction. Reassurance. Consolation. Joy!

*In **this** world, you **have** tribulation – **indeed!** But, be of good cheer – I have **overcome** the world! Come along, and come over **with** me!*

His disciples sense... they **know as they go**... that they are following their Master **into Life... abundant Life**...

as long as they **are** following him... not ignoring him... not hindering him... but following him...

as **long** as they're **behind** him.

Are **you** behind him now? Are you **following** Christ, your leader?

Are you staying out of his way... and are you in his way?

Well, friends, here at Towson Presbyterian – it seems that Christ **is** leading you... that you're on your way **together** to something new.

Your Lord is **taking** you where **he** wants you to go... to become, along with Rob and Joel, what **he** intends for you to become... to do what God needs you to do for his sake in this community.

I sense that you're energized and grateful and hopeful as you engage with Christ's help in a vigorous ministry;

Maybe you're becoming the **angels** he promised he'd be bringing with him one day.

You're not angels yet. (Well, a few of you might be!)

But surely there are tendencies... there is promise!

And Christ is a **most** capable, winsome and loving leader!

So I do not doubt but that, one day, I shall see you in that light.

I have **reason** to hope so! And so do **all** of you.

Finally, as we prepare to move toward celebrating Holy Communion with our Lord, I want to circle back to the Epistle lesson paired with the gospel for this day.

I'd like us to hear once more Paul's good guidance, God's life-giving counsel for disciples like us:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;

love one another with mutual affection;

outdo one another in showing honour.

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

As those to whom Christ has extended holy hospitality, you and I have much to celebrate, much to receive and much to offer as we follow in his way.

Thanks be to God for that!

Out of His Way and In His Way
Romans 12:9-21 and Matthew 16:21-28
Towson PC 3 September 2017
Rev. William Nickels

Preface

As we prepare to listen to a portion of Matthew's gospel this morning, I want to set the scene for you... particularly any of you who were not here last Sunday when Joel focused on the preceding verses.

If you **were** here (and if you were listening!), you know that at this point in the story, Jesus and the disciples are out on the road together...

preaching and teaching and feeding and healing and **challenging** people by telling them that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near... that it was even **then upon** them.

And the people are wondering just who Jesus is?

Elijah, perhaps? Or Jeremiah? Or one of the **other** prophets?

Or, maybe John the Baptist... who'd somehow been raised from the dead and was back at work?

All kinds of **possibilities** are being floated by folks.

*But, Jesus asks his disciples, **Who do you say that I am?***

For a time, I imagine, everything went silent as words started forming in the minds of Christ's followers.

You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, Simon Peter finally offers.

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah – for my Father himself has revealed this to you.

Now, reading from Matthew, Chapter 16, beginning at verse 21 –

From that time on, Jesus began to **show** his disciples that he must **go to Jerusalem** and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and **be killed**, and on the third day **be raised**.

And Peter **took him** aside and began to rebuke him, saying, *God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you!*

But he turned and said to Peter, *Get **behind** me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.*

Then Jesus told his disciples, *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*

For the word of God in scripture,
for the word of God among us,
for the word of God within us,
Thanks be to God.

Jesus began to show Peter and the other disciples that he must go... go to **Jerusalem**... and **undergo** great suffering... and be killed... and on the third day be raised.

He began to **show** them.

Now, to be honest, we don't know **what** that **means**, exactly.

Matthew didn't say that Jesus began to **tell** them he had to go, but rather, that he started to **show** them.

So it had to involve something **more** than speech.

I think he must have done something physical, like turning in the **direction** of Jerusalem and heading **off** that way...

maybe **pantomiming** suffering... and dying... and maybe even being resurrected.

Whatever it was, it's not spelled out.

But, whatever he **did**, we know that it moved Peter **profoundly** and **physically**.

We **know** this... because we're told that Peter **took** Jesus. He took Jesus **aside**... and rebuked him.

Now I **picture** that strong-armed fisherman jumping up in **front** of Jesus, grabbing him and then pushing him back and off the road, while declaring, *This must never happen to you!*

It's an image of a follower **asserting authority** over a leader, taking **control**... or **trying** to... a kind of a *coupe*.

But Jesus would have none of it. **Turning** away from Peter, he said, *Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me, here... standing in my way.*

Christ had somewhere to **go**, somewhere he knew he **must** go –

I must go to Jerusalem, and suffer, and be killed, and be raised.

And he would not allow anyone to hinder him as he went that way.

Peter **tried** to... putting up some **resistance**.

So, Jesus put Peter **in his place** – put him back **behind** him.

A **disciple's** proper **place**, we are shown, is **behind** Jesus.

Now, *disciple* is a word many of us would use in describing ourselves.

So, let me ask **you** now, are you **behind** Jesus?

Are you letting him lead you? Are you accepting his direction?

Are you listening **consciously** for his voice, his call, his instruction?

Are you responding to him faithfully, **following** as he goes?

Or, are **you** jumping up in front of him and blocking his way?

Are you **preventing** him from proceeding on the path he has chosen... **hindering** him from **taking you** where he wants and needs you to be?

Are you saying things like:

*Now, wait a minute, Jesus. How about letting **me** lead. I **know** where we need to go. I know where we ought to be heading.*

And, I know how to get us there without all this suffering and conflict and effort. My God, who wants that? Who needs that? Not you. Not me!

*Let **me** lead, Jesus. Let me take the **wheel**. I know a better road to steer us down than the one **you've** chosen.*

I know a smoother road, an easier way we can go than the one you're proposing - OK?

Maybe, like Peter, we **have** at times gotten up in **front** of Jesus to block the way, to **turn** him from the course he's set.

Or, maybe you're **considering** doing it **now**... in light of where he seems to be leading you, personally... or where it looks like he's taking this community of faith.

Well, I've a hunch that **our** Lord's not likely to allow **any** one to hinder him for **long**. He certainly didn't let Peter.

*Get **behind** me*, he said with that voice of **command**.

(And you can be **sure** that's **just** what Peter **did**!)

*Get **behind** me*, he calls out now to us, commanding and urging **us**, as well. *And follow... follow **me**... your **Lord**.*

Honestly, friend – are you man, woman or child **enough** to **refuse** him?

He has so **much** authority; and he is so faithful, and wise, and so full of **love** for us; and he is so trustworthy – like no one else in the whole wide world.

Why ever **would** we **refuse** him?

Well, at any rate, soon **enough**, that day, Christ **was** on his way.

He'd made it pretty **clear** that, while it was a way that would cost him dearly, it would, in the **end**, bring him **into life**...

into resurrection life... life in **all** fullness...

life in comparison to which the suffering would be as nothing.

And for everyone who followed him, it would be the **same**.

Even **as** they traveled that way **together**, in **spite** of the challenges, the hardship and the suffering they'd face, Christ's disciples would sense the **quality** of that rich, full life that was coming.

They'd sense its abundance overflowing the future, spilling back into their lives.

They would **sense** it in the **pleasure** they'd feel being on the road with Jesus...

in the **satisfaction** they'd feel while helping him work;

in the **reassurance** they'd feel whenever they shared a meal or prayed with him;

in the **consolation** that would come when they suffered along with him and for his sake;

and in the **joy** they'd feel while worshipping the Living God.

They would sense it. And **you and I** – don't we sense it, too, as we follow in our Savior's way?

Satisfaction. Reassurance. Consolation. Joy!

*In **this** world, you **have** tribulation – **indeed!** But, be of good cheer – I have **overcome** the world! Come along, and come over **with** me!*

His disciples sense... they **know as they go**... that they are following their Master **into Life... abundant Life**...

as long as they **are** following him... not ignoring him... not hindering him... but following him...

as **long** as they're **behind** him.

Are **you** behind him now? Are you **following** Christ, your leader?

Are you staying out of his way... and are you in his way?

Well, friends, here at Towson Presbyterian – it seems that Christ **is** leading you... that you're on your way **together** to something new.

Your Lord is **taking** you where **he** wants you to go... to become, along with Rob and Joel, what **he** intends for you to become... to do what God needs you to do for his sake in this community.

I sense that you're energized and grateful and hopeful as you engage with Christ's help in a vigorous ministry;

Maybe you're becoming the **angels** he promised he'd be bringing with him one day.

You're not angels yet. (Well, a few of you might be!)

But surely there are tendencies... there is promise!

And Christ is a **most** capable, winsome and loving leader!

So I do not doubt but that, one day, I shall see you in that light.

I have **reason** to hope so! And so do **all** of you.

Finally, as we prepare to move toward celebrating Holy Communion with our Lord, I want to circle back to the Epistle lesson paired with the gospel for this day.

I'd like us to hear once more Paul's good guidance, God's life-giving counsel for disciples like us:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;

love one another with mutual affection;

outdo one another in showing honour.

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

As those to whom Christ has extended holy hospitality, you and I have much to celebrate, much to receive and much to offer as we follow in his way.

Thanks be to God for that!

Out of His Way and In His Way
Romans 12:9-21 and Matthew 16:21-28
Towson PC 3 September 2017
Rev. William Nickels

Preface

As we prepare to listen to a portion of Matthew's gospel this morning, I want to set the scene for you... particularly any of you who were not here last Sunday when Joel focused on the preceding verses.

If you **were** here (and if you were listening!), you know that at this point in the story, Jesus and the disciples are out on the road together...

preaching and teaching and feeding and healing and **challenging** people by telling them that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near... that it was even **then upon** them.

And the people are wondering just who Jesus is?

Elijah, perhaps? Or Jeremiah? Or one of the **other** prophets?

Or, maybe John the Baptist... who'd somehow been raised from the dead and was back at work?

All kinds of **possibilities** are being floated by folks.

*But, Jesus asks his disciples, **Who do you say that I am?***

For a time, I imagine, everything went silent as words started forming in the minds of Christ's followers.

You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, Simon Peter finally offers.

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah – for my Father himself has revealed this to you.

Now, reading from Matthew, Chapter 16, beginning at verse 21 –

From that time on, Jesus began to **show** his disciples that he must **go to Jerusalem** and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and **be killed**, and on the third day **be raised**.

And Peter **took him** aside and began to rebuke him, saying, *God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you!*

But he turned and said to Peter, *Get **behind** me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.*

Then Jesus told his disciples, *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*

For the word of God in scripture,
for the word of God among us,
for the word of God within us,
Thanks be to God.

Jesus began to show Peter and the other disciples that he must go... go to **Jerusalem**... and **undergo** great suffering... and be killed... and on the third day be raised.

He began to **show** them.

Now, to be honest, we don't know **what** that **means**, exactly.

Matthew didn't say that Jesus began to **tell** them he had to go, but rather, that he started to **show** them.

So it had to involve something **more** than speech.

I think he must have done something physical, like turning in the **direction** of Jerusalem and heading **off** that way...

maybe **pantomiming** suffering... and dying... and maybe even being resurrected.

Whatever it was, it's not spelled out.

But, whatever he **did**, we know that it moved Peter **profoundly** and **physically**.

We **know** this... because we're told that Peter **took** Jesus. He took Jesus **aside**... and rebuked him.

Now I **picture** that strong-armed fisherman jumping up in **front** of Jesus, grabbing him and then pushing him back and off the road, while declaring, *This must never happen to you!*

It's an image of a follower **asserting authority** over a leader, taking **control**... or **trying** to... a kind of a *coupe*.

But Jesus would have none of it. **Turning** away from Peter, he said, *Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me, here... standing in my way.*

Christ had somewhere to **go**, somewhere he knew he **must** go –

I must go to Jerusalem, and suffer, and be killed, and be raised.

And he would not allow anyone to hinder him as he went that way.

Peter **tried** to... putting up some **resistance**.

So, Jesus put Peter **in his place** – put him back **behind** him.

A **disciple's** proper **place**, we are shown, is **behind** Jesus.

Now, *disciple* is a word many of us would use in describing ourselves.

So, let me ask **you** now, are you **behind** Jesus?

Are you letting him lead you? Are you accepting his direction?

Are you listening **consciously** for his voice, his call, his instruction?

Are you responding to him faithfully, **following** as he goes?

Or, are **you** jumping up in front of him and blocking his way?

Are you **preventing** him from proceeding on the path he has chosen... **hindering** him from **taking you** where he wants and needs you to be?

Are you saying things like:

*Now, wait a minute, Jesus. How about letting **me** lead. I **know** where we need to go. I know where we ought to be heading.*

And, I know how to get us there without all this suffering and conflict and effort. My God, who wants that? Who needs that? Not you. Not me!

*Let **me** lead, Jesus. Let me take the **wheel**. I know a better road to steer us down than the one **you've** chosen.*

I know a smoother road, an easier way we can go than the one you're proposing - OK?

Maybe, like Peter, we **have** at times gotten up in **front** of Jesus to block the way, to **turn** him from the course he's set.

Or, maybe you're **considering** doing it **now**... in light of where he seems to be leading you, personally... or where it looks like he's taking this community of faith.

Well, I've a hunch that **our** Lord's not likely to allow **any** one to hinder him for **long**. He certainly didn't let Peter.

*Get **behind** me*, he said with that voice of **command**.

(And you can be **sure** that's **just** what Peter **did**!)

*Get **behind** me*, he calls out now to us, commanding and urging **us**, as well. *And follow... follow **me**... your **Lord**.*

Honestly, friend – are you man, woman or child **enough** to **refuse** him?

He has so **much** authority; and he is so faithful, and wise, and so full of **love** for us; and he is so trustworthy – like no one else in the whole wide world.

Why ever **would** we **refuse** him?

Well, at any rate, soon **enough**, that day, Christ **was** on his way.

He'd made it pretty **clear** that, while it was a way that would cost him dearly, it would, in the **end**, bring him **into life**...

into resurrection life... life in **all** fullness...

life in comparison to which the suffering would be as nothing.

And for everyone who followed him, it would be the **same**.

Even **as** they traveled that way **together**, in **spite** of the challenges, the hardship and the suffering they'd face, Christ's disciples would sense the **quality** of that rich, full life that was coming.

They'd sense its abundance overflowing the future, spilling back into their lives.

They would **sense** it in the **pleasure** they'd feel being on the road with Jesus...

in the **satisfaction** they'd feel while helping him work;

in the **reassurance** they'd feel whenever they shared a meal or prayed with him;

in the **consolation** that would come when they suffered along with him and for his sake;

and in the **joy** they'd feel while worshipping the Living God.

They would sense it. And **you and I** – don't we sense it, too, as we follow in our Savior's way?

Satisfaction. Reassurance. Consolation. Joy!

*In **this** world, you **have** tribulation – **indeed!** But, be of good cheer – I have **overcome** the world! Come along, and come over **with** me!*

His disciples sense... they **know as they go**... that they are following their Master **into Life... abundant Life**...

as long as they **are** following him... not ignoring him... not hindering him... but following him...

as **long** as they're **behind** him.

Are **you** behind him now? Are you **following** Christ, your leader?

Are you staying out of his way... and are you in his way?

Well, friends, here at Towson Presbyterian – it seems that Christ **is** leading you... that you're on your way **together** to something new.

Your Lord is **taking** you where **he** wants you to go... to become, along with Rob and Joel, what **he** intends for you to become... to do what God needs you to do for his sake in this community.

I sense that you're energized and grateful and hopeful as you engage with Christ's help in a vigorous ministry;

Maybe you're becoming the **angels** he promised he'd be bringing with him one day.

You're not angels yet. (Well, a few of you might be!)

But surely there are tendencies... there is promise!

And Christ is a **most** capable, winsome and loving leader!

So I do not doubt but that, one day, I shall see you in that light.

I have **reason** to hope so! And so do **all** of you.

Finally, as we prepare to move toward celebrating Holy Communion with our Lord, I want to circle back to the Epistle lesson paired with the gospel for this day.

I'd like us to hear once more Paul's good guidance, God's life-giving counsel for disciples like us:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;

love one another with mutual affection;

outdo one another in showing honour.

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

As those to whom Christ has extended holy hospitality, you and I have much to celebrate, much to receive and much to offer as we follow in his way.

Thanks be to God for that!

Out of His Way and In His Way
Romans 12:9-21 and Matthew 16:21-28
Towson PC 3 September 2017
Rev. William Nickels

Preface

As we prepare to listen to a portion of Matthew's gospel this morning, I want to set the scene for you... particularly any of you who were not here last Sunday when Joel focused on the preceding verses.

If you **were** here (and if you were listening!), you know that at this point in the story, Jesus and the disciples are out on the road together...

preaching and teaching and feeding and healing and **challenging** people by telling them that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near... that it was even **then upon** them.

And the people are wondering just who Jesus is?

Elijah, perhaps? Or Jeremiah? Or one of the **other** prophets?

Or, maybe John the Baptist... who'd somehow been raised from the dead and was back at work?

All kinds of **possibilities** are being floated by folks.

But, Jesus asks his disciples, *Who do **you** say that I am?*

For a time, I imagine, everything went silent as words started forming in the minds of Christ's followers.

You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, Simon Peter finally offers.

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah – for my Father himself has revealed this to you.

Now, reading from Matthew, Chapter 16, beginning at verse 21 –

From that time on, Jesus began to **show** his disciples that he must **go to Jerusalem** and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and **be killed**, and on the third day **be raised**.

And Peter **took him** aside and began to rebuke him, saying, *God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you!*

But he turned and said to Peter, *Get **behind** me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.*

Then Jesus told his disciples, *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*

For the word of God in scripture,
for the word of God among us,
for the word of God within us,
Thanks be to God.

Jesus began to show Peter and the other disciples that he must go... go to **Jerusalem**... and **undergo** great suffering... and be killed... and on the third day be raised.

He began to **show** them.

Now, to be honest, we don't know **what** that **means**, exactly.

Matthew didn't say that Jesus began to **tell** them he had to go, but rather, that he started to **show** them.

So it had to involve something **more** than speech.

I think he must have done something physical, like turning in the **direction** of Jerusalem and heading **off** that way...

maybe **pantomiming** suffering... and dying... and maybe even being resurrected.

Whatever it was, it's not spelled out.

But, whatever he **did**, we know that it moved Peter **profoundly** and **physically**.

We **know** this... because we're told that Peter **took** Jesus. He took Jesus **aside**... and rebuked him.

Now I **picture** that strong-armed fisherman jumping up in **front** of Jesus, grabbing him and then pushing him back and off the road, while declaring, *This must never happen to you!*

It's an image of a follower **asserting authority** over a leader, taking **control**... or **trying** to... a kind of a *coupe*.

But Jesus would have none of it. **Turning** away from Peter, he said, *Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me, here... standing in my way.*

Christ had somewhere to **go**, somewhere he knew he **must** go –

I must go to Jerusalem, and suffer, and be killed, and be raised.

And he would not allow anyone to hinder him as he went that way.

Peter **tried** to... putting up some **resistance**.

So, Jesus put Peter **in his place** – put him back **behind** him.

A **disciple's** proper **place**, we are shown, is **behind** Jesus.

Now, *disciple* is a word many of us would use in describing ourselves.

So, let me ask **you** now, are you **behind** Jesus?

Are you letting him lead you? Are you accepting his direction?

Are you listening **consciously** for his voice, his call, his instruction?

Are you responding to him faithfully, **following** as he goes?

Or, are **you** jumping up in front of him and blocking his way?

Are you **preventing** him from proceeding on the path he has chosen... **hindering** him from **taking you** where he wants and needs you to be?

Are you saying things like:

*Now, wait a minute, Jesus. How about letting **me** lead. I **know** where we need to go. I know where we ought to be heading.*

And, I know how to get us there without all this suffering and conflict and effort. My God, who wants that? Who needs that? Not you. Not me!

*Let **me** lead, Jesus. Let me take the **wheel**. I know a better road to steer us down than the one **you've** chosen.*

I know a smoother road, an easier way we can go than the one you're proposing - OK?

Maybe, like Peter, we **have** at times gotten up in **front** of Jesus to block the way, to **turn** him from the course he's set.

Or, maybe you're **considering** doing it **now**... in light of where he seems to be leading you, personally... or where it looks like he's taking this community of faith.

Well, I've a hunch that **our** Lord's not likely to allow **any** one to hinder him for **long**. He certainly didn't let Peter.

*Get **behind** me*, he said with that voice of **command**.

(And you can be **sure** that's **just** what Peter **did**!)

*Get **behind** me*, he calls out now to us, commanding and urging **us**, as well. *And follow... follow **me**... your **Lord**.*

Honestly, friend – are you man, woman or child **enough** to **refuse** him?

He has so **much** authority; and he is so faithful, and wise, and so full of **love** for us; and he is so trustworthy – like no one else in the whole wide world.

Why ever **would** we **refuse** him?

Well, at any rate, soon **enough**, that day, Christ **was** on his way.

He'd made it pretty **clear** that, while it was a way that would cost him dearly, it would, in the **end**, bring him **into life**...

into resurrection life... life in **all** fullness...

life in comparison to which the suffering would be as nothing.

And for everyone who followed him, it would be the **same**.

Even **as** they traveled that way **together**, in **spite** of the challenges, the hardship and the suffering they'd face, Christ's disciples would sense the **quality** of that rich, full life that was coming.

They'd sense its abundance overflowing the future, spilling back into their lives.

They would **sense** it in the **pleasure** they'd feel being on the road with Jesus...

in the **satisfaction** they'd feel while helping him work;

in the **reassurance** they'd feel whenever they shared a meal or prayed with him;

in the **consolation** that would come when they suffered along with him and for his sake;

and in the **joy** they'd feel while worshipping the Living God.

They would sense it. And **you and I** – don't we sense it, too, as we follow in our Savior's way?

Satisfaction. Reassurance. Consolation. Joy!

*In **this** world, you **have** tribulation – **indeed!** But, be of good cheer – I have **overcome** the world! Come along, and come over **with** me!*

His disciples sense... they **know as they go**... that they are following their Master **into Life... abundant Life**...

as long as they **are** following him... not ignoring him... not hindering him... but following him...

as **long** as they're **behind** him.

Are **you** behind him now? Are you **following** Christ, your leader?

Are you staying out of his way... and are you in his way?

Well, friends, here at Towson Presbyterian – it seems that Christ **is** leading you... that you're on your way **together** to something new.

Your Lord is **taking** you where **he** wants you to go... to become, along with Rob and Joel, what **he** intends for you to become... to do what God needs you to do for his sake in this community.

I sense that you're energized and grateful and hopeful as you engage with Christ's help in a vigorous ministry;

Maybe you're becoming the **angels** he promised he'd be bringing with him one day.

You're not angels yet. (Well, a few of you might be!)

But surely there are tendencies... there is promise!

And Christ is a **most** capable, winsome and loving leader!

So I do not doubt but that, one day, I shall see you in that light.

I have **reason** to hope so! And so do **all** of you.

Finally, as we prepare to move toward celebrating Holy Communion with our Lord, I want to circle back to the Epistle lesson paired with the gospel for this day.

I'd like us to hear once more Paul's good guidance, God's life-giving counsel for disciples like us:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;

love one another with mutual affection;

outdo one another in showing honour.

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

As those to whom Christ has extended holy hospitality, you and I have much to celebrate, much to receive and much to offer as we follow in his way.

Thanks be to God for that!