

Passion

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.

Matthew 16:21, NRSV

This is the great turning point in Matthew's Gospel.

The disciples have been with Jesus for some time now. They've heard his authoritative teaching, and witnessed his compassionate miracles. Now, Jesus takes them to a place steeped in pagan worship and asks them the most important question: "Who do you say I am?"

Peter responds with a glorious confession of faith. But in the very next breath, when Jesus explains what being the Messiah truly means – that it involves suffering, rejection, and death –, Peter cannot accept it. He wants a victorious king, not a suffering servant. This clash reveals a tension that can still exist in our hearts: it's easier to love a Christ who gives a crown, but much harder to follow a Christ who looks to the cross.

Now choose a track and then return for...

Hymn Suggestions

1. "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross"
2. "Take Up Thy Cross, the Saviour Said"
3. "The Power of the Cross"

Closing Prayer

Father God,

We thank you for revealing to us that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Lord Jesus, forgive us for the times we seek a crown without a cross, for wanting you as our Saviour but not as our Lord. Give us the courage to hear your challenging call: to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow you.

As we journey towards Good Friday and Easter, may we not shrink from the reality of your sacrifice, but embrace it as the path to true life.

For it is in losing our life for your sake that we truly find it. Amen.



Reflective

**Let's read the first part of our passage:
Matthew 16:13-20.**

Jesus brings his disciples to Caesarea Philippi, a place filled with temples to pagan gods. In this place of competing loyalties, he asks two questions. First: "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" The answers are varied – John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah. People recognise Jesus as a great prophet, but they don't see the full picture.

Then Jesus makes it personal: "But who do you say that I am?". Simon Peter, speaking for the twelve, makes the great confession: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God". This isn't a lucky guess; Jesus says it has been revealed to him by God the Father. It's the climax of everything so far.

(Pause for a time of silence. Let Jesus ask you that question directly, right now: "Who do you say that I am?". What is the honest answer of your heart?.)

Now read the second part of the passage:
Matthew 16:21-25.

The mood shifts dramatically. "From that time on Jesus began to explain that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer... and be killed..." This is the divine "must". This is God's plan of salvation. But, it completely shatters Peter's idea of what a Messiah should do. A Messiah should conquer enemies, not suffer and die at their hands.

Peter is so horrified that he takes Jesus aside and rebukes him! "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you". Peter tries to save Jesus from the cross. And Jesus' reply is one of the hardest in all the Gospels: "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". Peter, who was just the rock of revelation, has now become a mouthpiece for temptation, voicing the very thing Satan wants to dangle in front of Jesus - a crown without a cross.

(Pause for another time of silence. Why was Jesus seemingly so harsh with Peter, so soon after praising him? How would Peter feel then? And, how might he feel later in life as he looks back on this exchange?)

Jesus then lays out the cost of following him, the true Messiah. It means denying yourself, taking up your cross, and following him. It's a paradox: the only way to save your life is to lose it for his sake.

For quiet reflection

- Like Peter, we can have our own ideas of what Jesus should be like, and what he should do in our lives. When has the reality of following Jesus not matched your expectations?
- What does it mean to "take up your cross" daily? If it's not just about bearing burdens, but about a daily death to self-centredness. What would that look like for you this week?
- Jesus says we must choose between the "divine things" and "human things". What's the difference? Is Jesus advocating for his followers to take themselves out of the world?

Creative Prayer Response

Look at a cross in the room, or hold a small one if you have one. You could even just trace the shape of a cross on your hand. As you focus on it, confess to God the ways you, like Peter, have wanted a more comfortable, less costly faith. Ask for the grace to embrace the way of the cross, trusting that it is the way of resurrection and life.

Takeaway for this week

Jesus calls his followers to "deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me". 'Taking up the cross' means a daily choice to put God's will before our own. This week, as you approach Good Friday, practice a 'daily cross'. Each morning, ask God: "Lord, what is one area today where my will conflicts with yours?" It might be in how you speak to your family, how you spend your free time, or in your attitude towards a difficult task. Your practical challenge is to deliberately choose his way in that area each day.

Now return to the first page for Hymn suggestions and a closing prayer



Digging Deeper

Read **Matthew 8:14-17**.

Discussion Starters:

1. Do you know anything of the religious and political significance of Caesarea Philippi in Jesus' day? Why might Jesus have chosen this specific location for this crucial conversation?
2. In **v. 16**, Peter confesses Jesus as "the Messiah, the Son of the living God". What did the title "Messiah" (or "Christ") mean to a first-century Jew? What were the common expectations? How did Jesus' definition in v. 21 radically subvert those expectations?
3. Jesus gives Simon the name "Peter" (Petros) and says he will build his church on this "rock" (petra). There is much debate about this. Is the 'rock' Peter himself, his confession of faith, or Jesus? What are the arguments for each view?
4. Why does Jesus react so strongly to Peter's rebuke, even seemingly calling him "Satan" (v. 23)? How is Peter's well-intentioned advice a "stumbling-block" or a temptation? (Compare with Jesus' temptations in the wilderness in Matthew 4).
5. Unpack the three commands in **v. 24**: "deny themselves," "take up their cross," and "follow me". What did crucifixion mean to the original audience? How does this redefine discipleship from a triumphal march to a sacrificial journey?

Applying this to our lives

- In what ways do we in the modern church still prefer a "Christ without a cross"? (e.g., prosperity gospels, faith as a tool for personal happiness, avoiding talk of sin and repentance).
- "Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it". How have you seen this paradox to be true in your own life, or the lives of other Christians?
- This passage is a prelude to the Passion. As we approach Easter, how does this conversation prepare us to understand the necessity and the glory of Good Friday and Easter Sunday?

For next time:

This passage is the hinge of the whole Gospel. Everything changes from this point on. This week, read the passage that immediately follows the Transfiguration in **Matthew 17:1-8**. How does this mountaintop experience confirm Peter's confession ("This is my Son, whom I love")? And, how does the Father's command ("Listen to him!") reinforce the challenging message about Jesus' upcoming suffering and death? Reflect on how these two events, held together, and how they give a complete picture of who Jesus is as we journey through Holy Week.

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FAMILIES & ALL-AGE

Matthew 16:13-25 - Jesus' explains what he's come to do, and it's hard to hear.

Helpful Resources

- Smooth, small pebbles
- Acrylic paints

INTRODUCTION ACTIVITY

Try and list all the things you **have** to do each week (eating, sleeping, brushing teeth etc). How many can you get to? What is the difference between the things we want to do, and the things that we have to do? Today we're going to hear about what Jesus said he **had** to do...

Interactive Story

One day, Jesus was walking with his friends in a place called Caesarea Philippi. He looked at them and asked, "Who do people say I am?" **(IF YOU'RE GROUP IS OLD ENOUGH, YOU COULD PLAY 20 QUESTIONS' GUESSING THE FAMOUS PERSON THROUGH A SERIES OF YES/NO QUESTIONS)**

His friends answered, "Some people say you are John the Baptist, come back to life. Others say you are a prophet like Elijah or Jeremiah."

Jesus nodded, but then he asked an even more important question. He looked right at his friends and said, "But what about you? Who do you say I am?"

Simon, one of his best friends, spoke up right away. With a big smile on his face, he said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" This meant he believed Jesus was the special one God had promised to send. **(DO A SMILING FACE FOR PETER)**

Jesus told him, "You are right! God himself told you this wonderful secret". Jesus then gave him a new name, "Peter," which means "rock". He said Peter would be a strong leader, like a rock. **(DOES ANYONE KNOW WHY THEY WERE GIVEN THEIR NAME OR WHAT IT MEANS?)**

But then Jesus told his friends how he was going to change things in the world. He said he would have to go to their capital city, Jerusalem. That some people would hurt him, and he would even die. **(NOW TURN THOSE SMILES INTO SADNESS)**

This made Peter very upset! He didn't want anything bad to happen to Jesus. So Peter took Jesus aside and said, "No, Lord! That will never happen to you!"

But Jesus looked at Peter with a serious face and said, "You are not thinking about this in the way that God sees it". Jesus knew that to help everyone, he had to go through that difficult time. **(YOU COULD USE THE 'PEBBLE' CRAFT HERE, SEE BELOW)**

Then Jesus spoke to all his friends and said a very important thing, "If you want to follow me, you must not always think about just yourself. You must be willing to put others first, and follow me".

Jesus meant that following him isn't always easy, but it is always the best way. He wants us to love him and others so much that we are willing to be kind, even when it's hard. When we do that, we get to be part of God's amazing family and have a happy life with him forever!

(A FINAL CHANGE FROM SAD FACES BACK TO HAPPY AGAIN)

GAME AND ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS

- **Craft:** Give each child a small, smooth rock. Have them use permanent markers or acrylic paint to decorate it. They can write a special word on it, like 'Jesus' or draw symbols that remind them of the story, like a cross or a heart. This craft helps them remember Peter's new name, "The Rock", and the idea that Jesus is their strong foundation.
- **Game:** 'Who am I?' A version of '20 questions' that is appropriate for the age group you have. Either one child or an adult thinks of someone very well-known and the rest of the group can only ask 20 yes or no questions to try and work out who it is.

TALKING POINTS

- What would you say if someone asked you 'who is Jesus?'
- Can you understand why Peter was so upset when Jesus explained what would happen? Do you think you would have felt the same?
- Why did Jesus say it had to happen? And, did it end with sadness or happiness?

Now return to the first page for Hymn suggestions and a closing prayer