

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

As many of you know *Sophia became Greek Orthodox* while she was at college in Santa Cruz. What you probably don't know is that the Orthodox Church has *experienced a flood of fundamentalist, evangelical converts* over the last two decades. Most have joined to reclaim the earliest liturgy and practice in Christianity; Orthodox worship has remained largely unchanged since the earliest centuries of Christianity. While they have *adopted orthodox worship practices well, they have not typically grasped the finer points of orthodox theology*. As a matter of course many of the new converts continue in their previous *fire and brimstone, turn or burn, Satan is gonna get you* understanding of the Christian faith.

Sophia now attends *St. Nicholas* Greek Orthodox Church in downtown Tacoma. A few pastors ago, the congregation's priest had previously been *a Southern Baptist pastor who converted to orthodoxy and became a priest*. And while he wore all the Greek Orthodox robes, *his theology and proclamation remained fundamentalist*.

One Sunday *mass this priest preached a sermon, and emphasizing that Satan was knocking at the door* and hammering home the need to his parishioners to resist. As the story was told to Sophia, *a longtime member of the parish in her late eighties* had had enough. *She stood up in her pew and said, "We no talk about Satan here. This is Kingdom of God. He no here."*

She was correct, as Orthodox theology – Lutheran as well – asserts

Christ meets us in this place of worship where Word and Sacrament proclaim Jesus Crucified and risen from the dead. *She was right in a more profound way also, since Christ has already been victorious over Satan, we need only keep our eyes on Jesus and follow Him.*

Hence, *Peter's mistake* this morning. When he rebukes Jesus for speaking of His coming Passion, Crucifixion and death. *Peter chooses a way other than Jesus' way to follow*, and *Jesus sets him straight in no uncertain terms*, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." *Choosing his own desire* – that Jesus not face suffering and death – *over Jesus' words and chosen path place Peter on the wrong path*, making Peter an adversary to Christ and the Kingdom of God.

A couple of things are important for us to know. **First**, it's important to know that *everyone who rebukes Jesus in Mark's gospel ends up being wrong*. So, not surprisingly, Peter is wrong. **Second**, dare I say it, Jesus speaks the truth in His rebuke of Peter. When Jesus refers to Peter as Satan, he's not just name calling. *Satan* – S(Shin) ṭ((Taleph) / נ((Nun) *in Hebrew – literally means the adversary or the adversary*. So Jesus' merely speaks precisely when He calls Peter Satan. The same is true for the translation of the word Satan is Greek – *διαβολος*, from which the word Devil is derived. *Diabolos* literally means *set against*.

Finally, *Jesus only speaks “to” Satan twice in Mark’s gospel;* during his *temptation following His Baptism* and here *when Peter rebukes Jesus – disagreeing with Jesus’ prediction of the necessity of suffering and death necessary to fulfill God’s work.* The meaning seems clear: our greatest temptation will be to deny the way of the Kingdom of God when it means suffering. But *Jesus issues a clear rebuke in this matter, and a prescription: You (pointing finger) get back in line – follow me.*

Why?

Because it’s the only way to life! **If you do not do so, you will lose the life God has given you.** Or, put another way, you will lose your humanity, your soul, you self.

A few minutes ago *Harmony Edith Augusta Marion came through the waters of Holy Baptism.* Like the *Hebrew people who followed Moses* through the Red Sea, and *like the people of Israel who followed Joshua* through the Jordan River to enter the promised Land, *Harmony became a follower of God – a follower of Jesus.*

What does it mean to follow Jesus into the kingdom of God?

It means to put Satan behind you, and keep Jesus in front of you.

If you’re going to follow someone you must keep your eyes on the one being followed, and try not to get ahead of him or her.

How do we keep our eyes on Jesus?

Sunday School, Christian Education, reading about Jesus in the Bible, studying to better understand Jesus' way of the cross and resurrection – the way of life.

How will we keep Harmony's eyes on Jesus?

We will pray for her, show Jesus love to her and each other, and she will know that this is the way to life, the only way she wants to go.

Confession is our way of saying, "Jesus, I'm sorry I got ahead of you. I thought I was heading in the right direction, or not, but I'm sorry. Please let me back in line."

We like to trust our judgment as wisdom, but Jesus says, "Get back in line, beloved."

Following the way is not so easy, but it is simple. Keep Jesus before your eyes all the time and you can't help but follow Him. And when you get ahead of yourself and Jesus, apologize and get back in line.

Amen !!!