

(PP1) Matthew 16:21-28

“Good to Know”

Have you ever used the phrase, “Good to know?” It is a phrase we love to attach to the odd-but-essential insights that friends, warning labels and well-intentioned parents throw our way. Who would have thought that peanut butter “may contain nuts,” or that “money doesn’t grow on trees?” Weird and obvious, but nonetheless, good to know.

The world we live in is filled with seemingly strange, but potentially useful facts and insights – the kind of quirky truths that can catch us off guard when first heard, but are legitimate enough to warrant a bit of space in our brains. For example, coconuts kill more people every year than sharks do. Good to know.

On average 12 newborn babies will be given to the wrong parents every day. Good to know. It is estimated that at any given time 0.7% of the world’s population is drunk. Good to know. And in the 1830’s, ketchup was sold as medicine. Good to know.

We sometimes take such inane truths and store them away, digging them out of the recesses of our brains to rescue a struggling conversation at a dinner party, or we save them for that moment when we happen to be a contestant on *Jeopardy!*, and the category is “19th century medicines now used as condiments.” Good to know.

Even our Lord Jesus wasn’t immune from offering up such “insights.” Like when he says, “What do you benefit if you gain the whole world, but lose your own soul?” Weird. Obvious. But definitely, Good to know.

Scripture is full of “Good to Know” truths – insights that we are certain are somehow applicable, even if we don’t immediately find an application for it. Take the book of Proverbs for example. Proverbs

27:14 says, “A loud and cheerful greeting early in the morning will be taken as a curse!” In other words, wait until your neighbor has showered and eaten a bagel before you shout blessings over the fence. Good to know.

Jesus’ words to his disciples in Matthew 16 are packed full of “Good to Know” insights. They come at us – no matter how many times we’ve studied them – with a tone that can feel harsh when read, and that seems to lack context, for the stark picture it paints. After all, prior to this moment, the picture Matthew paints in his Gospel has been largely positive for Jesus and his followers.

At this point, John the Baptist has been murdered. However, for Jesus it has been miracles, healings, profound parables and victorious verbal battles with the religious elite. Plus, just a few verses earlier, Peter has the greatest “Aha!” moment of human history, clearly confessing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

Yet here comes Jesus with a list of stark, strange insights about following him, that jar us out of our joy. Yet they are so laden with truth, we cannot ignore them. We cannot help but sense that they will “come in handy” sometime soon. They are definitely “good to know.” So, let’s examine a few.

(PP2) *First, Jesus is not surprised by his suffering, death and resurrection. He saved us with eyes wide open.* Good to know. Look at verse 21. It may be tempting to see Christ as an accidental Savior, unknowingly thrust to the cross, rather than one who embraced it, and who steadily pursued it on our behalf.

Christ perceived the path of righteousness as one that would be marked by suffering. He understood his ultimate trial as one of death, to be

vindicated through life. As Jesus disciples, this must shape how we see our own lives, following in his footsteps.

(PP 3) Second, *Jesus doesn't need us to protect him or defend him, but to follow him. We're his disciples, not members of his entourage.* In an entourage, there is the “star” at the center, the one around whom all the others orbit, and who live off of his or her awesomeness. Part of the job of the entourage is to protect the “shine” of the star – to help her or him perpetually look good.

This is, in essence, what Peter was attempting to do by talking Jesus out of the cross in verse 22. He assumes there must be a better, “shinier” path for Jesus, and therefore, the rest of the entourage to travel. But Jesus reminds Peter, and us, that our task is not to protect him, but to follow him. Good to know.

(PP4) Third, *to “find” ourselves, we must be willing to “lose” ourselves.* This is also very good to know. In verses 24-25, Jesus tells us that “Discipleship” is counter-intuitive. In the same way we don't protect Jesus from his path, we must not protect ourselves from the path of righteousness either. In this broken world, everything is backwards. We will only discover the greatness of God when we know and experience our very human limits, as Jesus did in the flesh.

We fight against this truth in a thousand different ways. In our living, in our praying, we try to “control” everything as though it all depends upon us! We must always temper ourselves with the truth that God's grace is located at the end of our rope, not the top of it.

(PP5) Fourth, *There will be a reward in the end, when Christ returns.* (v. 27) This, my friends, is really good to know. No, we are not told what the vindication will be for those who die to self through faith in Christ, but there *will be* vindication. Will it be some kind of parade

around the pearly gates? Will it be a monetary prize? If so, what currency will be used in the new creation? Euros? Dollars? Pesos?

The lack of detail would be bothersome if Jesus had not proven himself so trustworthy through his resurrection. So, while we don't know just what this "reward" will look like, we can be absolutely certain that there will be one. Good to know, especially on those days when the road of discipleship is, as Jesus predicted, decidedly dark.

The world we live in is filled with strange and painfully obvious information. For example, dumbwarnings.com is a website that compiles the world's dumbest warning labels found on everyday products. The Zippo lighter, for example, warns users "Do not ignite in face" and the Bayer Aspirin bottle warns users, "Do not take if allergic to aspirin."

While these may be obvious to most sober individuals, the sad fact is that the only reason such warnings are placed on products in the first place is because someone, somewhere, just wasn't as wise as the rest of us. Someone did, in fact, ignite a Zippo lighter in his face and set his beard and hair on fire. So this information is useful to someone, right? Good to know.

Perhaps that is how these insights from Jesus strike you: strange, true and obvious. And yet, for many...

- the idea of a God who *chooses* suffering in order to save, is strange;
- the idea of discipleship as discovering God at the *end of me*, rather than the *best* of me, is new;
- the idea that our ultimate reward is guaranteed now, but not delivered until *then*, is foreign.

It's all "good to know" – **essential** to know – but many don't yet know it. Or at the very least, are in great need of being reminded of it.

Which of Jesus' strange but essential, tough but true, "good to know" insights from Matthew 16 do we need to hear most? Is our picture of Jesus a little too safe? Are some of us at a particularly low point, needing to be reminded that we are, now, closer than ever to the goodness of God?

Are some of us nearing the end of our physical existence and wondering if it's all been worth it? If so, isn't it good to know that our reward is secured, and soon in sight.

I can't resist sharing just a few more "good to know" insights with you this morning. Did you all know that a regulation golf ball has 336 dimples? Or, that John Lennon's first girlfriend's name was Thelma Pickles? Or, that the plastic bag you brought your groceries home in, is not a toy? All things that, perhaps, are good to know.

If such obscure facts can seem even remotely useful, how much more are the words of Jesus worthy of some space in our brains, and especially in the hearts of God's people? We may choose to park the truth that "dying to self actually guarantees life" right next to "Jimmy Carter was the first president born in a hospital."

We just never know when we'll need to access such truths, but something inside us tells us we will. They're both good to know; one, of course, much more than the other. May God bless you all! Amen.

Benediction – The call to live as Christ's disciples is made possible through the power of God's Holy Spirit working in and through us. Friends, go as ones who are sent -- sent to be salt and light and to reflect the glory of God to those around you. Amen.

Invocation- Holy Creator, we greet you with joy as we gather for worship, grateful to be in your presence and in fellowship with one another. We assemble as your covenant people to cast before you our adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication. We lift up our voices in praise, we desire to know you in truth, and we open ourselves to the work of your Holy Spirit in us and in our common life. You alone are worthy of our worship, for yours is the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory and the majesty. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer - Great and loving God, we thank you for the teachings and life of Jesus Christ through whom we come to know you. We acknowledge that sometimes what we learn from him is difficult, Lord. We are not readily given to self-denial or cross-bearing, so we ask for faith and courage to follow in the ways of Jesus. Give us a bolder vision of who we can be in you. Grant us deeper compassion for others that our selfishness might not overwhelm us. Inspire us to love and give to others as a thankful response to your love and gifts for us. For the sake of Christ we pray. Amen.

Prayer Offertory - You have blessed us with every good gift, generous God. Our hearts overflow with joy and love for the privilege of walking with you and being called your own. Receive these gifts, we pray, as our faithful and grateful response to your gifts of grace and mercy in our lives. Amen.

Hymn

Take My Life

Sermon Notes

Matthew 16:21-28

“Good to Know”

- Have you ever used the phrase, “Good to know!” It is a phrase we love to attach to the odd-but-essential insights that friends, warning labels and well-intentioned parents throw our way. Who would have thought that peanut butter “may contain nuts,” or that “money doesn’t grow on trees?” Weird and obvious, but nonetheless, good to know.
- The world we live in is filled with seemingly strange, but potentially useful facts and insights – the kind of quirky truths that can catch us off guard when first heard, but are legitimate enough to warrant a bit of space in our brains.
- Jesus’ words to his disciples in Matthew 16 are packed full of “Good to Know” insights. They are so laden with truth, we can’t ignore them.
- **First**, *Jesus is not surprised by his suffering, death and resurrection. He saved us with eyes wide open.* Christ perceived the path of righteousness as one that would be marked by suffering. He understood his ultimate trial as one of death to be vindicated through life. As Jesus disciples, this must shape how we see our own lives, following in his footsteps.
- **Second**, *Jesus doesn’t need us to protect him or defend him, but to follow him.* Jesus reminds Peter, and us, that our task is not to protect Jesus, but to follow him.
- **Third**, *to “find” ourselves, we must be willing to “lose” ourselves.* “Discipleship” is counter-intuitive. We will only discover the greatness of God when we know and experience our very human limits, as Jesus did in the flesh. God’s grace is located at the end of our rope, not the top of it.
- **Fourth**, *There will be a reward in the end, when Christ returns.* (v. 27)
- Perhaps that is how these insights from Jesus strike you: strange, true and obvious. And yet, for many... the idea of a God who *chooses* suffering in order to save is strange; the idea of discipleship as discovering God at the *end of me*, rather than the *best* of me, is new; the idea that our ultimate reward is guaranteed now, but not delivered until *then*, is foreign. It’s all “good to know” – essential to know! ***May God bless you!***

Matthew 16:21-28**“Good to Know”***Jesus Predicts His Death*

21 From then on Jesus began to tell his disciples plainly that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, and that he would suffer many terrible things at the hands of the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but on the third day he would be raised from the dead.

22 But Peter took him aside and began to reprimand him for saying such things. “Heaven forbid, Lord,” he said. “This will never happen to you!”

23 Jesus turned to Peter and said, “Get away from me, Satan! You are a dangerous trap to me. You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God’s.”

24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me.

25 If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.

26 And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?

27 For the Son of Man will come with his angels in the glory of his Father and will judge all people according to their deeds.

28 And I tell you the truth, some standing here right now will not die before they see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom.”