



Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost
30 August 2026

Ascension Lutheran Church
Rev. Christian W. Marien

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Our dryer died. Not all at once but little by little. It slowly got tired of heating. But we persevered. Every time we put clothes into the dryer, we would give the dryer some encouragement. “You can do it!” AND “Yes you can!” And then one day – after words of encouragement and a full hour – everything was still ice cold. “Get behind me Satan!” I said, to borrow the line from the story of Jesus today. However, I may have been too forceful in my rebuke, because not only did the dryer not come back to life, but three burners on the oven range went out and I was forced to cook pots of noodles on the little tiny burner at the back of the stovetop for three months until we had enough money saved up to purchase a new range for the kitchen.

²¹ From then on Jesus began to point out to his disciples that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and be raised the third day. ²² Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, “Oh no, Lord! This will never happen to you!” ²³ Jesus turned and told Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me because you’re not thinking about God’s concerns but human concerns.”

If you were here last Sunday, we just finished celebrating Peter’s momentous confession of faith. “You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God!” After which Jesus blesses Peter. “Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my father in heaven. You are Peter and, on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.” But today. Oh, how quickly the tables have turned. From confession of faith and foundation of the church to enemy of God and stumbling block to Jesus. Being Peter is anything but easy. Balancing the desires of the divine for the world and the hopes of our own human failings it turns out, is anything but easy. Peter wants a Messiah who embodies strength and power. Jesus comes as suffering servant to save his people from their sins. Because Peter could not come to terms with a Messiah who would suffer, Peter speaks the opinions of the world. That the chosen one of God would come with the harshness of power not the humility of weakness.

And then Jesus shows us the way.

²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.” And before we get too far down the road, trying to decide which cross to pick up – Luther gives us an assist. It turns out, Luther taught, that raising children and managing a household provide more than enough daily “crosses” to test and strengthen a person’s faith. Have you been there? Are you there right now?

Sometimes it seems as if we spend more time looking for a suitable cross to bear than acknowledging the one we are already carrying. Much of the time, I believe the troubles we are already balancing seem too insignificant for us to bother God with our need. Yet, God would remind us, ⁷ “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

It has been a wonderful week of preparation for the fall. Funny, that after traveling for a good part of the summer for Adventure Camp, the CRASH mission trip, the Youth Gathering, the Tanzania mission trip, a week of vacation, and then hosting a friend from college days for a four-day visit – I was so excited to actually be at work – here at church. In the office, visiting members, planning for the fall, catching up with staff and tending the life-giving and life-draining moments happening in the lives of members of this community. We celebrated a life. I prayed for the arrival of twins. The Good Samaritan Fund tended someone in the gap between an hourly work day and an upcoming surgery. Stories were told of days in Tanzania and children’s ministry was prepared to be ready to launch. The 2027 budget will begin to take shape as the budget team gathers. Book studies are preparing to launch. Musicians are beginning to schedule rehearsals and someone is considering taking up a cross and trying choir or maybe better yet – someone is planning to give Vicki, our Director of Music Ministries, a new cross to bear and I will tell you Vicki would only be too excited to pick it up. A creative



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writing event is being planned for October – Finding Your Faith Witness – helping anyone who wants to craft the story of their faith into an actual story to share to the glory of God. A service project for God's Work, Our Hands is signing up volunteers for an all-congregational service project after each service on the 13th of September. A new bike rider group is preparing to launch along with the Outreach for Hope Run, Walk, Ride Fundraiser at the end of September. Asylum case letters have been written in support of a family preparing for their next court appearance. Pastor Edwin and I have been praying and tending the people of San Jorge, El Salvador in the midst of crop failure – this church is sending money to provide food baskets for every family in the congregation. A new heart valve replaced an old one for one member. Bus trips have been planned. New hips are flying off the shelves and I am expecting a whole new crop of runners in 2027 for the Outreach for Hope Event. Kleenex boxes are piled higher than we hoped and glue sticks will keep things sticky at Lowell Elementary until 2028. Next Sunday we will pray for the people of Kijenge Parish in Tanzania as they gather for worship and a building fundraiser. And that barely scratches the surface of all that is happening in and through Ascension. And in the midst of all of that – I have walked with a family outside the church as they prepared to say goodbye to their dad. And another family inside the church who said goodbye to their mother and grandmother last night. Backpacks have been blessed. And, honestly, I would not have it any other way.

This is ministry. This is life. These are the crosses we choose to take up to follow Jesus to the glory of God. Not every cross is difficult – some might actually bring us joy – but every cross, every act of service, every moment of meeting a need in this community of faith and beyond this community of faith is meaningful in this life we live as we follow Jesus.

So when I hear Jesus speak these words to us, I am content with what Jesus asks of us. What does Jesus say to us? ²⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me will find it.

What does it mean to lose one's life for Jesus? You will have to decide. Will you beat the light in unbearable times? Will you endure amid the unendurable? Will you bear witness when everything seems in grief and shadow?

Yes, I will. Yes, you can. Hear the same encouragement I gave to the dryer who chose not to persevere. You can do it. The encouragement comes from the mouth of our Savior himself. Ask. Seek. Knock. The door will be opened. Again and again and again. This is the promise Jesus makes to each of us. And this is why we have the strength to pick up our cross.

Jesus, always, shows us the way. Pick up your cross.

The way of love. Pick up your cross.

The way of suffering. Pick up your cross.

The way of death into resurrection. Pick up your cross.

Jesus will be there to show us the way. Pick up your cross.

This is what it means to lose your life, for Jesus. Pick up your cross.

This is the power of God's grace. This is what God's grace can do.

In our deepest need, our darkest grief, in the very shadow of death itself – Jesus tells us to pick up our cross, and then he shows us how to carry that cross – all-the-way-home. Just because Jesus asks us to pick up our cross, doesn't mean Jesus asks us to carry our cross alone. And that my friends, is all the good news we need to hear this day.

Thanks be to God. Amen.