

Get me behind me, Satan, sermon by Rev. R Randy Day, August 30, 2026

Scripture reading: Romans, 12:9–21 and Matthew 16:21–28

With the Gospel reading, most of you have been here week after week as we move through the Gospel of Matthew. We hit the midway point last week, as I mentioned, and here we have another very familiar, famous story of Jesus with his disciples. He's explaining to them for the first time that he's going to have to face death, and this is pretty hard for them to understand.

They recognize Jesus as the Messiah. If you were here last week, that was part of it. The first time in the Gospel that the word Messiah was used was just a week ago, in the passage just before this. So, they understand that, and they think they understand that, yes, Jesus is the Messiah.

But the definition of Messiah in the minds of the Jews at that point—Peter and the rest of them—was that the Messiah was going to be a political Messiah, to deliver the Jewish people from the oppressive Roman Empire and set them free. That's what they had been hoping for, way before the Romans came. The whole concept of Messiah.

So you can just see Peter and the other guys scratching their heads a bit. Let me see now. How can a dead Messiah, a dead king, protect his people from their enemies? How exactly does that work?

They were logical. They were fairly well educated, so they're trying to get their heads around this concept, and you can see why it was difficult.

The king in this case is not talking about power with brute force, but talking about a power that comes through sacrifice. And we all know what happened on Good Friday, and the cross that we see in each and every church, and the crucifix that we see in Catholic churches and others, the bare cross we see in most Protestant churches.

The cross reminds us of that suffering, and then the resurrection and the gift that came. But they're hearing it for the first time. It's kind of hard to understand, and there are a lot of contradictions. We, in our own lives, sometimes live with these contradictions.

Jesus is trying to give them meaning. He's trying to give them purpose in their lives, and eventually that works. It's just that right when they're hearing this message, it's not quite getting through. He's trying to give them that purpose.

For many of us, we're looking for purpose in life. We're looking for meaning in our lives, and yet often we feel like we're on that hamster wheel.

Remember those? Your kids ever have one of those, or you see them in the pet store? The hamster gets there and goes round and round and round. Makes me dizzy just to look at it. Poor animal, but I guess the animal enjoyed it. I don't know.

Round and around and around. How do you get off? How do you get off of that? How do we humans get off of that wheel?

I see some smiles and heads nodding. Yeah, we're probably on it right now. We just barely got to church on time. We're trying to slow down and check in at least for an hour or so before we get back on the wheel.

I don't want you to get back on there.

I also ran across the idea of the linchpin. You know, the linchpin was first invented—we have engineers here, I know—in the 14th century. This little clip keeps the wheel on the axle; otherwise, the wheel goes off the axle. From the 14th century, we've had these. You can Google today and see the most modern ones. The term linchpin is also used in farming.

And so I said, "Wow, I remember this. I was the first grandchild, the only grandchild for a while, and I was out there. One of my jobs as a kid was that my grandfather would back the tractor up to, let's say, the plow, big old plow, right? And my job was to drop that pin in."

Some of you are shaking your head. You had to be very careful not to get your fingers in there. I'd lose my fingers. And I look back and think about the skill that my grandfather had in this huge, big tractor. By just moving it a little bit and rocking it just a little bit, it got just to the right point, and boom, down it would go, locked in.

So I was thinking: Here's a tractor with all this energy. Sometimes I'll just say this half of the congregation is the tractor. All this energy, filled up with gasoline. You're ready to go. Lots of energy. You can go out in the field and go up and down a field all day.

Not much is going to happen over here. We have the plow sitting here at the edge of the old plow shed, ready to turn the earth over. This earth that could be planted into soybeans or corn or lettuce or whatever. The plow knows what to do, but the plow is stuck here without some power.

So if we put the two together, we find the linchpin, drop it in there, and then the tractor can pull the plow, plow the field, and do whatever you want, plant whatever you want, and then the harvest will come.

There's action. There's meaning in your life if you can find the linchpin. So we keep looking for those, and it's important that we find them.

I have a lot of illustrations about a linchpin.

I see one of the TV networks will weigh in on a typical story—sad stories about someone who has encountered a disease, some surgery or maybe a test, and has an enormous bill. You know, maybe half a million dollars. Bills are always spread out on the dining room table, and the folks don't have the money to pay for it, and they've been denied by the insurance company. Lots of rules, whatever loopholes—denied.

So they go to one of the networks, and the network shows up and examines all this and takes a lot of pictures and films. It's going to be on the evening news.

Oh, guess what? The insurance company reviews it and changes their mind within a day. Happens all the time. Great story, but those are just a few people who get through that way.

On a basis closer to where we are, I know a number of you have been advocates for other people. Maybe you see someone who is really at the end of life, maybe in the wrong facility. Maybe a phone call or two can intervene. You become the advocate.

And rather than sort of talking about all the homeless people in a big old homogeneous group as misfits and losers, you zero in on one person. You help that person with some clothes, maybe new clothes, maybe some good used clothes, maybe bus fare to go to the interview.

The person gets a job and it's turned around. It's not a homeless person anymore in a category.

You were the advocate. You did something.

A lot of you are doing that over and over and over. You've been doing it your whole lives.

I see David back there. He writes a lot of letters. He's our advocate, one of our advocates, for the homeless in Massachusetts. God bless the papers like the Boston Globe that publish your letters, because, yeah, they're really good.

Let the church say amen to that.

[amen!]

All right. Powerful letters. Letters can make a big difference.

There may be other cases like that, but the advocate is just so very, very important.

And here's Peter trying to understand this whole thing. Peter really is sort of taking the senior role in a bit. If you think about this, Peter's coming over here next to Jesus, and he's putting his arm around him.

"Listen, Jesus, you know, we figured out you're the Messiah last week, but I'm telling you, this is not quite fitting. Here's what you need to do. You can't be talking about this death thing."

And so what Jesus says—I won't look at you when I say it—but, "Get behind me, Satan." Right? "Get behind me, Satan. Don't tempt me. You need to listen to what I'm saying."

But, you know, I feel a little sorry for Peter.

It's kind of hard to grasp what's wrong, what's right, what's end, what's not. We have the same challenge today.

Late yesterday afternoon, I went to a leading supermarket in my hometown to pick up groceries that were ordered online by Emily. A young man came out. I've seen him two or three times. He loves our dog, but didn't have the dog yesterday.

So I just said, "So how's it going?"

He said, "Yeah, it's going okay." He says it's going okay, but he says, "You know, some people. What really bothers me is that some people order the food and they never show up."

And I'm kind of naive. I said, "Really? They don't?"

He said, "Yeah, they just don't show up."

And I said, "I feel guilty if I'm 10 minutes late."

And he said, "Oh, you don't have to worry."

He said, "We have two lists: reliable and unreliable. And you're on the reliable list."

So that really got me thinking, because Peter's here in this passage.

We think of Saint Peter, Richard, up there at the pearly gates with this big old ledger, right? He's going, "Sweet, Sweet Phyllis, Phyllis. Oh, come on in, Phyllis. You help the sick. We know you."

The big old ledger.

But now I'm thinking maybe, maybe Saint Peter is going to high tech too. Maybe he has a great big screen: "reliable" and "unreliable".

So then I'm like, well, how do we fit in there? How do we fit in? How do we know?

We know if we pay attention to what the apostle Paul said to the church at Rome. Maybe they were struggling with reliable and unreliable, so he put it in his letter, which Al read a few moments ago.

But we're going to dwell on it a little bit here. This is some of the heart of the New Testament.

If you're not familiar with the Bible, and you just say, "I'd like a couple places I could turn to real quick. Like, I know something about the Bible." Go to Romans, near the back of the Bible, New Testament. Near the back, Romans, and think 12-12, disciples, 12. Find chapter 12 and read it. It's one of the best parts of the entire Bible.

"Let love be genuine. Hate what is evil."

Okay, handle that.

"Have mutual affection. Outdo one another in showing honor."

"Outdo one another in showing honor." Just think about that one for a while.

"Do not lag in zeal."

Okay.

"Be ardent in spirit. Serve the Lord."

Okay, there's a lot of that around here.

"Rejoice in hope."

There's one. Rejoice in hope.

Some of you have dealt in prison ministries, and the prisoners will say the one thing that they really have to hang on to is hope. It's the same in much of the medical field and much of other parts of our lives. Hope. Hope is really, really important.

And he says that here: "Rejoice in hope, be patient in affliction, persevere in prayer, contribute to the needs of the saints, pursue hospitality."

"Pursue hospitality."

Period.

No, it says, "Pursue hospitality to strangers."

My, my. Hospitality to strangers. It's been part of the Christian Church for over 2,000 years, but I think it bears repeating. Bears repeating.

"Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice."

Yep. Birthday parties, all those sorts of things.

"Weep with those who weep."

Many of you were here for Penny's service the other day, so we rejoice, we weep, we do all of those things.

"Live in harmony with one another. Do not be arrogant."

Ah. I just want to put up a big billboard. I'm not for billboards, but I just want to blast out the—"Do not be arrogant" message.

A lot of people are arrogant. That's how you get ahead in many circles these days in this culture. Be arrogant, broad shoulders, sharp elbows, push everybody out of your way. Got to get your way. Got to be first, and never apologize.

It says here, **"Do not be arrogant, but associate with the lowly, do not claim to be wiser than you are."**

There's another good one. We kind of skip over that. "Don't claim to be wiser than you are."

"Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all."

What is noble in the sight of all.

"Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God."

Ah, we talked about wrath a couple weeks ago. The Grapes of Wrath came from the Bible, from Revelations. The whole idea of the wrath of God.

What he's saying here to the folks at that first church in Rome is, you guys aren't in charge of vengeance. Let it go. God will do the vengeance that needs to be done. It'll come from the wrath of God. You're not in charge of the vengeance. God is.

"If your enemies are hungry, feed them."

Ah, there's a good one.

You know, we cover so many crises in the sermons and the prayers here, but I did read twice this week that world hunger has gone down. The number of people globally suffering from hunger is declining, and I say the churches, the NGOs, the UN, all kinds of groups, and governments around the world, especially Scandinavian countries, give tons of money to help turn around the issue of hunger worldwide.

So that's good. Still a long way to go, but that is in the good news department.

"If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

"Overcome evil with good."

So, gosh, if you just—I don't know—this week tackle, say, three out of that list, it'll probably get you in the reliable column with St. Peter, huh?

And then next week work on a couple more. You know, then a couple more. Some will be a little harder than others.

But we, as the church, know we have different calls, and we in the church support one another. That's why we need perseverance.

Sometimes some of these tasks are a bit harder than others that we're called to. Others come across pretty easy. We get both of them.

If you're stuck in some hard ones right now, no one's picking on you. It's just kind of part of life.

Maybe you've got some easy ones right now. That's good. Rejoice in that.

"Rejoice with those who rejoice. Mourn with those who mourn."

But in each and every case, know that your God is with you, and your God wants you to be on the reliable side.

Amen.