Grace and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

In last week’s gospel reading, Jesus praised his disciple Peter. Peter had confessed Jesus was the Messiah. and Jesus said he will be the “rock” on which Christ will build the church. But by Jesus saying “from this time on” this signals a transformation. Not a transformation the disciples will gladly embrace. Jesus shared that he must go to Jerusalem where he will experience great suffering under the religious leaders, will be killed, and will be raised on the third day. Instead of being crowned he would be executed. Instead of utilizing military might he would be humbled and submissive. The one thing they missed is his resurrection, which is the good news after the shocking news. Peter rebuked Jesus and protests saying “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.” The irony is the student is rebuking the Rabbi and what God will forbid is a tumbling block to carrying out his wishes for the world. Peter once again thinks he is Jesus protector when just the opposite is true. Just when we figure Peter finally gets it (way to go Peter!) and that’s why he was designated as the rock of the church we find out once again Peter gets it wrong and we discover why Jesus sternly ordered them not to tell others he was the Messiah. To them, the Messiah was someone who would come and defeat the oppressors and return Israel to its proper place in the world. Now he delivers the shocking news. His mission is much more important. Jesus and the anointed one, as the Messiah, is the Savior of the world.

Now Rabbi Jesus tells the disciple student Peter, “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 is trying to prevent suffering and death and feels there must a better way to save the world is a human response. The spiritual response is something different. Jesus explains to Peter and all his disciples that, in fact, this is the way to life—losing one’s life in order to find it.

We are not very good at suffering. It is something we try to avoid. The reality is we will all suffer. Suffer at losses in our lives-loss of loved ones, loss of health, financial losses, loss of friendships, so on and so forth. suffering, because of what Jesus did for us, is not the last word. As followers of Jesus we take up the cross. This is not an invitation, for disciples then or now, to start looking for crosses to bear. The logic of the kingdom does not have to do with plotting the way to success. Instead, disciples are called to an obediently humble giving of self for the neighbor in which hearing and doing are brought into conformity and the whole of the law is fulfilled. This conformity comes only by the transforming model and power of God’s blessing and presence in this Messiah, who promises to be with this community to the end of the age.

The late Maya Angelou says: “I am grateful to have been loved and to be able to love, because that liberates. Love liberates. It doesn’t just hold — that’s ego. Love liberates. It doesn’t bind.”

Are we willing to accept cheap grace or are willing to experience the grace of God by align ing our lives in line with our beliefs? We too can say that “Jesus is the Messiah” but it is actually living those words that is a gift of God. The hope in the Messiah is truly an act of God’s love.

Thanks be to God. Amen.