**“Simultaneously Saint and Sinner” 2017 09 03**

**Matthew 16:21-28 Pr. H. Adachi**

May the Grace and Peace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, be showered upon you in the name of our Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit!

At the beginning of this year, I talked about the movie “Silence” a little bit and touched on Father Rodrigues in the movie. In the mid-16th century, Christianity was spreading in Japan.

By the early 17th century, political leaders there were afraid of the growth of the Christian population and banned Christianity for almost two and half centuries. Many Roman Catholic Fathers from Europe and also Japanese Christians who did not step on a Jesus Icon and did not apostatize their faith were martyred.

Among them, Father Rodrigues stepped on the Icon and apostatized in public, then spent the rest of his life in Japan not as Christian Father. I felt that the focus of the movie was that Jesus was working through even those who apostatized, and I talked about Father Rodrigues in my February sermon asking if you thought God was silent for those martyred and for those apostatized.

In the movie, there was another character, named Kichijiro. In today’s message, I would like to talk about him a little bit. He stumbled as a Christian many times… but he ended up stepping on the Jesus Icon many times.

He was not the one of those who did not apostatize then were crucified and he was neither someone who apostatized completely. After stepping on the Icon, each time, Kichijiro asked for God’s mercy and forgiveness repeatedly.

When I was reading the Gospel lesson and thinking about Peter, it reminded me of Kichijiro. For me, Peter and Kichijiro were overlapped. Of course, the eras and places they lived in were very different. Peter lived in the first century in Israel, and Kichijiro during 16th and 17th centuries in Japan. I do not think Peter apostatized as many times as Kichijiro did.

However, in other parts of the Gospel it tells us that Peter denied Jesus when he found that he would be crucified, not only once but three times. Should we consider these denials Peter’s apostasy?

Also, several weeks ago, we read the story that Peter jumped out from the boat and tried to walk on the water in front of Jesus. He did great for the first step, then he started sinking. Jesus pointed out the doubt in his faith.

When we think about what happened before today’s Gospel, Peter did a perfect confession to Jesus, saying that “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” However, there was a major misunderstanding in Peter’s mind.

As evidence, Peter was scolded by Jesus, “Get behind me, Satan.” Peter imagined his own perfect God, the King of the world. He was probably thinking about his own ideal Jesus who could defeat the Roman empire. He was not able to think about Jesus, the Son of God, who would be crucified.

However, God’s plan mandated that Jesus would suffer and be crucified and buried, but resurrected be on the third day. Jesus was the incarnated Son of God, born as a human, who would be killed and even go to hell, then be resurrected by God, the Father.

Jesus was a human being and God. In humanity’s perception, Jesus existence was (and still is) controversial, and Peter could not get it at that time.

Who is Peter? He doubted his faith in Jesus. He misunderstood Jesus. He denied the Lord three times. He stumbled again and again…when I thought about him, I could not help thinking about Kichijiro, who stepped on Jesus again and again.

And when we think about Peter and Kichijiro’s unstable faith in Jesus, at least to me, it is the reality of our faith today. Even though we are assured to be forgiven and blessed and sent to the world as faithful Christians after Sunday services, we seem to bring our burdens and, as Jesus suggested, we carry our cross as Christians when we come back to the Sanctuary.

It is God’s blessings that we always confess our sins at the beginning of the Sunday services. In any of Resurrection’s services, the first traditional, the second praise service, or the third service, we always confess our sins. Martin Luther described that Christians are simultaneously Saints and Sinners.

Even though we were baptized, confessed our faith in Christ, and became righteous by God’s grace and mercy, at the same time, we sin. We do something that is really unfavorable to God and turns us away from God.

God is always gracious to people who are controversial. Jesus who is our living God and human at the same time is walking with each one of us with his grace and mercy. Therefore, we, too, walk with Joy in Christ even though we continually stumble and misunderstand our Lord. With all our human failings, Jesus still loves and forgives us. Amen.