

Romans 12: 9 Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;  
10 love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor.  
11 Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.  
12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.  
13 Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.  
14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.  
15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.  
16 Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly;  
do not claim to be wiser than you are.  
17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.  
18 If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.  
19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is  
written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."  
20 No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something  
to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads."  
21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Matthew 16:21 From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to  
Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and  
scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.  
22 And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This  
must never happen to you."  
23 But he turned and said to 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."  
24 Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny  
themselves and take up their cross and follow me.  
25 For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my  
sake will find it.  
26 For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what  
will they give in return for their life?  
27 "For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he  
will repay everyone for what has been done.  
28 Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see  
the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

Loving Creator shine as a light before me that you may be seen and not I. Give me words  
that I may speak, give us ears that we may hear and through your Holy Spirit help us  
understand.  
Amen.

Jesus was a prophet.

In today's reading he got his friends together and told them something. He told them  
what would happen.

He said he would go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

This was not what they wanted to hear. They wanted to hear something else, anything else, not that their friend, their leader, the hope of Israel was going to die. Who would want that? Who wants a loved one to die?

Peter comes to Jesus and says "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you."

Peter was probably expressing the feeling of the whole group. Perhaps they encouraged him "You tell him Peter, he listens to you." But all his concern seems lost on Jesus who says he is an opponent, the word Satan means adversary or opponent. Peter is opposing God, opposing Jesus, and that is not acceptable.

Peter's reasons were understandable, though, don't you think? He could not see anything to be gained by Jesus' death. He was focused on the other kind of profit; Miriam Webster defines this kind of profit, the one with an 'f', as gain or a valuable return. What was to be gained by Jesus' death? Where was the value in it?

Peter's personal attachment was actually keeping him from the larger truth of God's will. This is why he was focused on the profit with an 'f' and couldn't understand the words of Jesus the Prophet.

I think we all deal with this issue in our lives.

Paul dwells on this often in his letters. He contrasts what he calls the life of the flesh with the life of the Spirit.

**For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.**

We might think of flesh as the bodily things, the creature things of life. Paul speaks of the flesh in terms of greed, jealousy, envy, lust, and things like that. These things are the way of the world.

In this world, when we are in pain and want it to end and Paul says: **be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.**

When we see a stranger we may be inclined to take a defensive position: **Paul says: extend hospitality to strangers.**

If someone is persecuting us we may want to give it back to them, but Paul says: **Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.**

This all goes counter to the way the world works.

These are the ways of Jesus the Prophet, not the ways of the world of the flesh, a world that seeks profit.

The confirmation class goes to New York each year, and for the past few years we have walked to Times Square where we get to see the sights and hear sounds at what could be called the heart of the modern world, a Mecca of the flesh.

Several times we have seen Naked Cowboy, who, while not quite fully naked, is a monument to the flesh.

We can see signs everywhere selling every conceivable type of goods and services. There are always people there on the streets trying to hawk something, trips, shows, bus tours, and anything else that might make them a profit.

One of the newer stores is M&M World, three floors of M&M merchandise. I like M&Ms just fine, but those tasty little chocolate treats are now the reason for a merchandising bonanza, someone decided they could get more profits by having a Disney-like center for their product.

Outside the billboards are huge, TV screens cover buildings in moving living color, and it is as if every square inch of Times Square is devoted to selling something. This is after all what the world needs: profits the kind that means a valuable return.

Is that the bottom line?

Should profits be the whole story?

In his book Mustard Seed Versus McWorld, Tom Sine says that McDonalds has become the most recognized logo in the world. He contrasts two approaches in the world, the global commercialization exemplified by McDonalds, which he calls McWorld and the mustard seed faith of Jesus.

He says that “Christians have the challenging task of finding a way to be part of the world, in all its dimensions, while doing battle with any values that we believe are contrary with God’s new global order.”

This is where Peter got messed up, he was more concerned with what he thought was important and was going counter to what God was doing.

The Bible has no problem with having a valuable return. Jesus does not discourage us from doing well or from enjoying life, but, for Jesus, profits, making money, satisfying the flesh is not the bottom line. The bottom line is sharing the love of God and doing God’s will.

We are creature of the flesh, but how we live as fleshly creatures is important. Where is our focus? Is it on making money at all costs? Is it on satisfying all our creature desires for rich food, sex, feel good drugs, or fashion? Remember the old Billy Crystal bit, “it is better to look good than to feel good.”

Today looking good in business has to do with returns and gains, with profits and bottom lines, it has to do with stock prices and shareholder earnings. If the shareholder will do better if the company cuts out health insurance or pensions, then that is often what is done. Workers are finding less and less loyalty from large corporations whose primary motivation is making money.

Once upon a time, there was an expectation in America that a person could go to work for a company and stay there till retirement. The bills would get paid, and, in the end, a pension might take care of the person in retirement. This was the case for many blue collar workers, the laborers who are the bedrock of the American economy.

We are celebrating Labor Day this weekend. This holiday began as a celebration honoring the commitment of the American worker. Today it simply marks the end of the summer season, and it is a chance for a nice three day weekend for people.

I think we need to remember that it is the laborer who makes it possible for this country to function. Today those laborers are often working two or three part-time jobs because then employers don't have to pay for benefits.

What are we about?

Are we becoming a society where profits and greed are the cornerstones? Are we a nation that has embraced the flesh in ways that leave many people behind so others can get their wants met?

I think we all want our needs met, but how we do that is important. Where is faith?

Does it have a place in how we do business, or are we distracted by what we want, by the flesh?

When Peter said to Jesus God forbid it- don't leave us; he was responding to his own wants, his fleshly desire to keep his friend with him. He wanted to control the situation, not to allow faith to be his guide. He was not hearing the prophet.

Greg Mobley, professor at Andover Newton Theological School says that what the prophets are able to do is to see through. They see through into what is likely to happen given the current situation.

This is what got Elijah and Elisha in trouble; it is the same thing that made Jeremiah the fun person he was to be around. People did not want to hear the words of the prophets when they gave them bad news. They were often abused and the targets of attacks.

Jesus was seeing through to what would happen if he kept following God's will. He knew that if he continued to preach the love of God, if he continued to speak of God's abundant forgiveness, he would face the ire of the powers that be.

He knew what would happen to him. He would face derision, and abuse, he would undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed. This was too much for Peter to hear.

Peter seems not to have heard the whole message, though. He seems to have heard only that Jesus would suffer and die. What he missed was the rest of the story: and on the third day be raised.

That changes everything.  
He would die, and on the third day be raised up.  
Here is the valuable return.

Jesus was able to see the whole picture through the faith that he had. Through his acceptance of God's will, through the particular gift of prophecy that he had, he knew what must happen.

He was not distracted by the realities of the flesh, of his own wants; he had a clear vision of what God was doing, and what God would do.

Jesus was prepared to give up his life, not because he wanted to, not because he liked the idea, but because he knew his death does bring a great return. We all gain, we all profit if we accept the sacrifice he made and the promise of the empty tomb.

Following Jesus is a great challenge for this reason, because he asks us to find faith in God. He asks us to find a faith like a mustard seed that will lead us to the empty tomb to see for ourselves what God can do.

That mustard seed of faith often looks small and insignificant next to the challenges and troubles of the world, but it will do. It seems insufficient compared to the world of the flesh, the world of greed and selfishness, but it is all we really need to find the truth. It is through God's truth that we can see how things should be.

Jesus asks **“what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?”**

Jesus came to offer us life in all its abundance, and he opened the doors of death so we might have life eternal, all this is ours if we just follow the right prophet.

To God be all the glory.  
AMEN.