



13th Sunday After Pentecost – August 22-23-24, 2026

Preacher: Pastor Scott Oelhafen

Semon Theme: **Sermon: No Pain – No Gain**

1. Christ's pain is our gain 2. Earthly pain is heavenly gain

13 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" 14 They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." 15 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." 17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. 18 And I tell you that you are Peter,^[b] and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades^[c] will not overcome it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be^[d] bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be^[e] loosed in heaven." 20 Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah. Matthew 16: 13-20

Dear Fellow Followers of Jesus,

It's good to stand in front of you. Seriously. Like Peter said at the Transfiguration, it is good for us to be here, in this church sanctuary, praising God for all our blessings and to call on Him for forgiveness and help. So how was your summer? It's been a while since I've served as a presiding minister. I pray it was busy and blessed. Summers in Minnesota are great, until they're not. Maybe you know this: but, five weeks ago, I blew out my right knee and severed my patella tendon in front of my house. Who knew lawn work could be so dangerous? I did not. After surgery and some healing, I couldn't even lift my own leg out of bed or off the couch only three weeks ago. And just look at me now. So what changed? God's grace and my wife's 24-hour care. I'm grateful. Oh, God gave me one more thing. God used Physical Therapy to help my healing. Many of you know how this works if you've had knee, hip, or shoulder injuries. Three times a day I've been doing twelve different exercises to help strengthen and stretch the tendons and muscles of my right knee that's immobilized right now. My New Ulm doc says it will take another ten months of hard work in PT – but he says it will get better. Thank you for your prayers and support. I'm not going to lie. I can't bend my knee very far and it doesn't feel so good when I do in PT. But, like my therapist says: "No pain, no gain."

"No pain", no gain" is also true for anyone who pushes themselves to the limit. Right now, athletes at Martin Luther College, MVL, and New Ulm Public are literally feeling that phrase: "no pain, no gain". During grueling practices, arms feel like dead weights, legs like wet noodles, and lungs set on fire. Does that sound like you? For some of you, I can see it in your eyes. For others, -- maybe once upon a time.

In our sermon reading from Matthew, chapter 16, Jesus talks about something far more important than patients or athletes in action. He's talking about His mission and what He wants us to believe, confess, and follow. In Matthew, chapter 16, Jesus teaches us: **No Pain, No Gain**. First, we'll learn that Christ's pain is our gain. Then, we'll understand that earthly pain is heavenly gain.

In the words immediately following our sermon text, Jesus shared his busy schedule of Holy Week. It's like He whips out his personal calendar, runs his almighty finger down the days of the week. Palm Sunday **"go to Jerusalem"**, Maundy Thursday **"Suffer many things"**, Good Friday **"be killed"** and on Easter Sunday **"Be raised to life"**. Now, we all have busy schedules. But believe me and believe the Bible, no one has had a more busy or more important schedule than our Beautiful Savior. Shedding a few pounds to get in shape wasn't on Jesus' mind. Shedding the sins of the world was on the line. And the only way to do that was through pain. And it was much worse pain than any athlete or patient in history had to experience. Here's the bottom line: if Jesus didn't go through His pain, the pain of suffering for sin, then we would experience that pain. I mean each of us has secretly snacked on the sin of gossiping about our classmates, coworkers, and neighbors, just to make ourselves feel tiny bit better. We've all binged on the sin of complaining even though honestly, we've had it pretty good. We all deserve to be left alone in hell, punished for our sins for all eternity.

But, take one more look at Jesus' calendar. I'd like to point out one beautiful word that's often overlooked. It's the word: **"must"**. That calendar of Christ wasn't written in pencil so it could be erased. God wrote it in permanent marker so nothing would be changed. Jesus **MUST** go to Jerusalem and suffer many things. He **MUST** be killed and be raised again. He **MUST** have the pain. Pain wasn't an option for Jesus. It was a necessity if God's Son could make up for every sin and make sinners right with God.

And He did this by His blood-stained cross. He has earned heaven for us, for all. It's a done deal. It's an accomplished fact. And that's good news. That's Gospel news we need every day. But not everyone believes it. Not everyone recognizes that Jesus is the Messiah and only Savior from sin. Maybe you didn't know this but at the time Jesus said this in Matthew 16, many were leaving Jesus. Can you imagine? Leave Jesus? Why do such a thing? It's simple. It was hard. It's hard to listen to Jesus, to love the people Jesus tells us to love, to serve Jesus with our best instead of just our left-overs. It's hard to look in the mirror of God's law to see our own sins, to repent of them, and leave sin behind. So Jesus refocuses all of us and asked his closest followers a good question in our sermon text: **"Who do people say the Son of Man is?"** And they answer: **"Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."** Now we've NEVER been confused with legendary prophets like John the Baptist, Elijah or Jeremiah like Jesus was. And that sounds like a pretty good answer, doesn't it? But, only saying Jesus is a great prophet or teacher is not enough. It's not enough to get anyone into the kingdom of God. So Jesus gets even more personal with His disciples and asks: ¹⁵ **"But what about you?" "Who do you say I am?"** Good question Jesus. That's not a question you can ignore or avoid. It's a question every single person needs to address. So what's the right answer? Peter had

it. ¹⁶ **Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”** BINGO. Peter speaks for the disciples, and for us, as a beautiful model of faith. He knows Jesus as both the Son of Man and Son of God who has taken away the sin of the world. By faith, Christ’s pain is our gain. That means every sin that dragged us in the door this evening/morning is forgiven, forgotten, forever only by Jesus. How did Peter know all this? Jesus explained: **Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.** Of course, Peter didn’t figure it out on his own, but God the Father gave him the right answer just like he has done for us again today. Then, Jesus adds this sentence: ¹⁸ **And I tell you that you are Peter,^[b] and on this rock I will build my church.** From the Greek words He used, Jesus did not build his church on sinful people, but on a Christian confession. It’s the same Christian confession we use in a school, in a church, in a hospital, and on a deathbed. Even our children confess and believe: Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so. **No pain – no gain.** No doubt, Christ’s pain is our gain.

And finally, notice what Jesus says. **the gates of Hades (or Hell) will not overcome it.** Doesn’t it feel like sometimes hell will win and heaven will lose. I mean, we struggle. We hurt. We sometimes wonder: “Does anyone up there even like me?” But, we know the answer. God doesn’t just like us. He loves us. Remember that in our darkest day: when we experience a friend or coworker let us down, when we experience a medical emergency or even when we lose a loved one: **the gates of Hades^[c] will not overcome.** Clearly, in the end, Jesus wins and so does everyone who stands with him. And remember this: Jesus has promised to take away all our sins. But, He has never once promised to take away all earthly pain. In fact, it’s just the opposite: the Christian life this side of Eden tends to be hard. St. Paul’s was right on the nose when he said: **We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22).** Sometimes our earthly pain leads us to drop to our knees and ask God to help. Sometimes our earthly pain leads us to release our earthly securities and hold tighter to Christ. And sometimes our earthly pain makes us long for heaven. Earthly pain is heavenly gain.

The great CS Lewis once wrote: “Aim for heaven and you get earth thrown in. Aim for earth and you get neither.” If our focus is heavenly, getting ourselves and others to heaven through Jesus, not only do we gain heaven as a gift of His grace, but we also get a life of meaning and purpose. But, it will involve pain. Patients who have physical therapy get that. And it’s all worth it. To those of us who know Christ and His pain, we agree with St. Paul who knew pain by experience, but looked ahead and declared: **I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us (Romans 8:18).** Is heaven worth it? Every day of the week. Then, with Christ, let’s live like that’s true, because it is. Amen.