

Sermon for The Holy Cross

Date: August 22, 2021

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Numbers 21:4–9

Epistle Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:18–25

Gospel Reading: John 12:20–33



Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 1:18–25

Sermon Title: Under the Cross

Hymns:

LSB 427 – In the Cross of Christ I Glory

LSB 527 – O Savior, Precious Savior

LSB 582 – God's Word Is Our Great Heritage

LSB 425 – When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

LSB 837 Lift High the Cross

Songs:

House Of The Lord - Phil Wickham

Lord I Lift Your Name on High

The Wonderful Cross

Wake Up Sleeper - Austin French

What Wondrous Love Is This

Liturgy:

Divine Service: Prayer and Praise I

Liturgy:

Creative Worship



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Text: 1 Corinthians 1:18–25

The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

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Grace, mercy, and peace to you in Jesus' name. Amen.

With the second onset of COVID looming we are again witnessing the actions of people struggling to cope. Struggling to cope with loss. Struggling to cope with fear. Struggling to cope with uncertainty. Struggling to cope with death.

Though generally not on such a scale, or over such a time, it is still a struggle that is carried on everyday. Loss, fear, uncertainty and death did not just begin about a year and a half ago. They happen everyday and have been since Genesis chapter three. Everyday there are people, including you and me, who are struggling to cope with life in this messed up world, with the surprises and difficulties that life brings.

There are people struggling to cope with stress. Struggling to cope with disease. Struggling to cope with betrayal. Struggling to cope with financial strains. Struggling to cope with isolation. Struggling to cope with unemployment. Struggling to cope with loneliness. They are all Struggling to cope with sin, death, and the power of the devil, and with the whole host of other difficulties and challenges these things bring.

These are the people around you everyday. These are the people sitting with you here today. No one is exempt, so how do we cope? Where do we turn? To whom or what do we look for the answers?

Some turn to their spouses, or to family and friends, for support and strength. Some turn to government for assurance of protection and provision. Some turn to themselves, looking inside themselves for what they need.

What then happens when these things let you down? What happens when your spouse doesn't measure up to the challenges Satan brings? What happens when family and friends aren't there every time you need them. What happens when the administration changes, or congress flips sides with an election and the policies change? What happens when you have been push so far you feel like you're drowning in the hate the world throws at you?

When those we look to for strength are weak? When those we go to for help are themselves needing help? When those we thought would always come through for us aren't there? When those we thought would provide for us can't even provide for themselves? When we look inside ourselves and there find more hurt? What happens when we feel we have no answers, and when we find

we ourselves are responsible for some of our own troubles? What happens when we discover that sin got us; that the sin in us has not only hurt us, but has also caused others pain and struggle?

That is the dilemma we are facing. Our faith in others, our faith in our government, our faith in the strength of buildings, our faith in ourselves... it all lets us down. It always will. Your faith is only as strong as its object, as the one, or the thing, in which you put your faith. In such things the day will come when you find, all that we thought wise, is not. All that we thought strong, is not. All that we thought enduring, is not. All that we thought we could count on, we can't.

St. Paul said it:

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe?
Where is the debater of this age?¹

Where is all that we thought we could count on? Where are all who thought they had the answers? Where are the answers? Many are still asking those questions, and searching for the answers. They are looking to a place where the ultimate answer, the answer to all of these things, cannot be found. They continue to look to things of this world. These things will fade.²

There is a place to which we can look. There is a place that has all the answers. A place that will ensure we have no more question as to where our help comes from.³ There is a place where our strength, our hope, our assurance, our life, our certainty will prevail.

The answer is right before our eyes. God planted the answer in the world, in this life, on a small mountain right outside a city named Jerusalem. There, on Calvary, on Golgotha, on "skull hill."⁴ There is where He planted His answer. His answer to sin and sin's affect on this world. There is where He planted His answer to the struggles of this world. His answer to the loss and fear and uncertainty of this world. There is where He planted the cross of Christ. In doing so He was saying, "You want answers? There's the answer!"

It is the answer because the cross shows us that we are not alone in this struggle. The cross shows us God Himself has shown up to walk, not behind

1 1 Corinthians 1:20

2 1 Peter 1:24-35; Isaiah 40:8

3 Psalm 121:1-2

4 Matthew 27:33

us, not beside us, but in front of us. He has come to engage the enemy in mortal combat Himself.

Not just in some fuzzy, spiritual way that we can't really grasp or hold on to. Not in some way we would have trouble finding or figuring out, but in a very real and tangible way. A flesh and blood way. A real life way. A real death way.

The One who was Himself betrayed is with us in betrayal. The One whose friends turned on Him or abandoned Him is with us when our friends fail us. The One whose family turned on Him⁵ is with us when family doesn't come through. The One who was forsaken⁶ is with us when we are forsaken. The One who was hungry, thirsty, tempted and hated, and had no place to lay His head,⁷ is with us as we face such struggles.

The One who faced death is with us even when we face death. So when we wonder, as so many wonder, "Where is God in all of this?" "Where is God when we need Him?" The cross shows us that He is not far away. He is near. He is not unconcerned, but has joined Himself to us in His deep concern. He does not ignore us, but is in fact, right there with us in human suffering and struggle. He is with us to give all that He has, even giving His life, so that we who are struggling might live.

The answers we are looking for are found in what looks like the very opposite of what we expect to find. The things of this world that look so mighty and strong turn out to be frail and fragile. The cross looks so humble and weak, yet it gives real strength, real hope, and real salvation. So when we are looking for life, we look at death. When we are looking for strength, we look at weakness. When we are looking for acceptance, we look at rejection. When we are looking for God, we look to a man. When we look for forgiveness, we look at the condemnation and forsaken. That's what it means to look to the cross.

Now the world hears that and calls it foolishness. Ridiculous! Nonsense! Fodder for a weak mind. St. Paul by God-breathed Word reminds us:

The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, to those who are being saved it is the power

5 Mark 3:21

6 Matthew 27:46

7 Luke 9:58

of God. For it is written, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.’⁸

It is the wisdom and glory of God. It is where God has come to us. That coming to where we are, so that He might take us to where He is. “Foolishness! Ridiculous! Nonsense!” The world says. How can a man who lived and died some 2,000 years ago help you now? He can only if that man who lived and died was not just a man, but the very Son of God who lived and died, and then lived again. He is the One who can, still today, in flesh and blood, in real life, be here with His people.

“Foolishness! Ridiculous! Nonsense!” The world says. Where is their better answer?

God says, it is a reality. The only thing of which you can be sure. It is the only thing that will not let you down. It is an empty cross, because, “Christ is arisen. He is risen indeed.” That shows us the love of God, and assures us that His promises are true. The empty cross shows us His wrath against sin, poured out on His Son, that we be certain He is not punishing us now. It is the empty cross that shows us His forgiveness, so that we know nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.⁹

The empty cross shows us those things because just as God and man were together on that cross, and together in the grave, so we know that they were also together in the resurrection, and will therefore also be together with us in Heaven, as He promised.

Whatever happens in this life, whether we think it good or bad, fortunate or unfortunate, tragedy or joy, it does not happen by chance or by fate, but happens by design, with one goal in mind: to lead us to a life under the cross. Leading us to live a life under the cross.

In the Holy Gospel we read today some people came and said to the disciples, “We wish to see Jesus.”¹⁰ That was not only their desire, it is God’s desire as well. That we see Jesus, but not just anywhere. We must see Him first on the cross We must see His blood, His shame, His weakness, and His death. In seeing that you know the love God has for you.

8 1 Corinthians 1:18-19

9 Romans 8:39

10 John 12:21

Then see that empty cross which God planted in this world for you, and who still is planting His cross in the lives of His children. Planting the empty cross in our hearts when we are Baptized. Planting the empty cross in our hearts as we hear His Word. Planting the empty cross in our hearts as we eat and drink the Body and Blood of the Holy One who hung on the cross.

He is with us. He is in us, and we are in Him. In Him we have all that we need. Under the cross we have His forgiveness. Under the cross we have new life and resurrection. Under the cross we have the strength to not only deal with life in this world, but to live the life that God has given to us. A life without fear and confusion. A life of hope, and love and confidence.

Under the empty cross God's Word comes to us, and with it comes all that God provides. What God provides will never fail.

Amen.

**Proclaim God's Word,
Encourage one another in faith,
Witness to God's love and
Serve all people**

