

Lent 2024 – The Hidden Glory of the Cross

"It Is Hidden in the Savior's Rejection by His Own"

Text: Matthew 26:57-68

*Not all the blood of beasts on Jewish altars slain
Could give the guilty conscience peace or wash away the stain.*

*My soul looks back to see the burden Thou didst bear
When hanging on the cursed tree and knows my guilt is there.*

*But Christ, the heav'nly Lamb, takes all our sins away
A sacrifice of nobler name and richer blood than they.*

*Believing we rejoice to see the curse remove;
We bless the Lamb with cheerful voice and sing His bleeding love.* (TLH
156)

Dear Fellow Recipients of the gift of forgiveness:

Continuing the theme for our meditations this Lenten season ("The Hidden Glory of the Cross") this evening we further explore that theme by noting that the glory of the cross was hidden in the Savior's rejection by his own people. The text that will form the basis for our meditation this evening is found in the 26th Chapter of Matthew's Gospel:

^{ESV}(**Matthew 26:57-68**) *Then those who had seized Jesus led him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had gathered. ⁵⁸ And Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and going inside he sat with the guards to see the end. ⁵⁹ Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, ⁶⁰ but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward ⁶¹ and said, "This man said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.'" ⁶² And the high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" ⁶³ But Jesus remained silent. And the high priest said to him, "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." ⁶⁴ Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." ⁶⁵ Then the high priest tore his robes and*

said, "He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy. ⁶⁶ What is your judgment?" They answered, "He deserves death." ⁶⁷ Then they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him, ⁶⁸ saying, "Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?"

This is God's Word. Confident that our God will bless us through the study of these words, so we pray, "**Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth.**" Amen.

The Apostle Paul verified that Jesus faced two very different enemies when he wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:22, "**For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom.**" Last week we saw how Pontius Pilate, representing Jesus' secular enemies, displayed his faux wisdom with his arrogant, humanistic, rhetorical question, "**What is truth?**" and how the glory of the cross is hidden by the world's rejection of the cross as foolishness. This evening we seek to uncover the glory of the cross hidden by Jesus' rejection at the hands of his own people.

I assume no one here this evening claims to have seen Jesus. Nor has anyone seen God the Father or God the Holy Spirit. Why then do you not only believe that such a God exists, but that he deserves your praise and thanksgiving, your devotion and obedience? You have never met anyone who was raised from the dead, or obviously and miraculously healed of congenital blindness or paralysis, or one who has walked on water. How then can you be certain that such things are true and real? How is it that you have come to place your hope and confidence on just such unverifiable phenomena?

Your answer, of course, would be, "*By faith*" and you would of course be right. The temptation here is that we grow weary of letting faith be what faith must always be – a divine gift that allows us to believe in what we can in no way prove. We continually slouch back to our natural craving for evidence, despite Jesus' warning that it is weakness and sin to seek out and rely upon such evidence. "**Blessed are those,**" said Jesus, "**who have not seen and yet have believed.**" It is a flaw in our faith that constantly seeks corroboration; a weakness that thus yearns for the very thing that would make faith something other than faith. A bold, strong faith does not waver in the absence of evidence. It simply takes God at his Word and carries on without a sideways glance.

What sort of confirmation then do you and I tend to seek, and what does any of this have to do with our study this evening?

Perhaps the most powerful corroborating evidence for which we yearn is "the crowd." In other words, we take a certain amount of comfort in the conviction of the masses. Who wouldn't be greatly encouraged, for example, if our entire diverse society suddenly confessed their belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior? Wouldn't such a positive movement of the masses give you an extra measure of comfort that your faith is valid? Would it, on the other hand, make what you believe about Jesus Christ to be any more true than it is now? Clearly not. Viewed from the opposite perspective, wouldn't you find it discouraging – *don't you find it discouraging even today* – that so many reject the very things that you hold so dear? Do you find yourself strengthened or discouraged when you hear that what you believe has fallen out of favor and is now openly ridiculed? Yet the rejection and ridicule of the world isn't the worst of it, is it? There is another assault that tends to be much more demoralizing: the betrayal of those who *ought to know better*.

There is an unavoidable and yet understandable double standard at work here. We are much harder on those we feel ought to know better. A doctor might smile if a patient tells him that tying knots in a string and burying that string in a manure pile cures warts. (Yes, that's actually a thing.) That same doctor, however, tends to get downright hostile if that sort of nonsense is promoted by another medical professional. It is much the same in every profession, including among religious leaders. In Matthew 18:7 Jesus said, ***"Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!"***

This speaks to the heart of the theme we examine this evening. While Jesus was certainly rejected by the world, his rejection by his own people, especially the religious leaders *who ought to have known better*, was a particularly bitter pill. While the glory of the cross is hidden by the world's rejection, how much greater the damage when those who ought to know better reject the true Jesus.

Remember how Paul condemned the Jews for ***"seeking signs"***? While certainly true (we heard evidence in our Passion History reading this even in connection with Herod) such evidence obviously didn't convince them. Visible evidence is never the foundation of faith. Remember that almost from the beginning of his ministry the Jewish religious leaders had sent spies into Jesus' camp. Those spies obviously reported back, which means they knew about the raising of the boy outside of Nain, Jairus' daughter, and Lazarus. They knew about the healing of the blind, deaf, and lame. They had heard about the feeding of the thousands, the walking on water, casting out demons, and changing of water to wine. Jesus had provided the signs they craved, *and it made absolutely no difference*. Their

demonic hatred for Jesus had obviously blinded them to the very evidence that they had demanded, and which Jesus had undeniably provided.

The Son of God was being wrongly accused and condemned by the very human beings he came to save. That tragedy was compounded by the fact that he was rejected by his own people. In condemning Jesus, the High Priest was unwittingly and unintentionally doing what High Priests had always done – he was sacrificing "a lamb without blemish" for the sins of the people. That's part of why they should have known better. Every aspect of the Old Testament pointed clearly and undeniably to Jesus as the fulfillment. As the animals sacrificed had to be flawless, so Jesus was flawless. The Old Testament, which the religious leaders knew intimately, foretold that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, live for a time in Egypt and then Nazareth. He would be born of a virgin, a descendant of Abraham, and a descendant of David. He would be preceded by a forerunner, betrayed for 30 pieces of silver, executed with criminals, and killed by crucifixion. There are at least 47 Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah, and Jesus fulfilled every single one of them. And yet it made absolutely no difference to his own people. Is it any wonder he offered no miraculous signs during his trial and crucifixion?

So what do we do with this information? Having noted that Jesus was rejected by his own, despite overwhelming evidence of his innocence and multiple signs that verified his divinity, do we just let it go at that, shake our heads sadly in righteous indignation, and move on? Surely this study would be little more than an exercise in futility if that was all there was to it. What cold comfort simply to examine the 2000-year-old sins of others.

As is so often the case, what was happening then is happening now, and that which threatened souls in Jesus' day is still threatening souls today, including our own.

Though we like to pretend otherwise, you and I are profoundly affected by what others say and think. The words and actions of others have a dramatic impact on our choice of clothes and shoes, how we style our hair, the figures of speech that we use, and on and on. It is therefore both foolish and dangerous to pretend that what those who profess to be Christians today think about our religious convictions have no effect on us. The fact is that just as the rejection of Jesus by his own people served to hide the glory of the cross then, so also the rejection of the real Jesus Christ by the churches of our day has much the same effect.

What does that mean – "the rejection of *the real* Jesus Christ"? The very question strikes at the heart of the problem. People today don't tend to reject their own version of Jesus; they reject only the real thing. Virtually no one in America today will condemn you for saying that Jesus was a good guy and that he deserved better than he got. That's the watered down, mushy version of Jesus. The real Jesus is the one who claimed to be the Son of God and Savior of the World. The real Jesus is the one who claimed to represent the one path to heaven and who foretold a sentence of eternal torment upon every soul who rejected his claim. The real Jesus is the one who said, ***"He that believes and is baptized shall be saved. He that believes not shall be condemned."***

Make no mistake. This is what is really being rejected today, even by many who claim to believe in Jesus and who therefore ought to know better. And their rejection of the true Jesus is most certainly having its effect. Let it not be so among us. Acknowledge the danger but take the time to see through it.

The rejection of Jesus Christ, even by those who should have known better, simply emphasizes the fact that Jesus came to save stubborn, rebellious, ungrateful sinners. There is a great comfort here, because that means that he came to save you and me. What a friend we have in the real Jesus, the one who did not come to teach us how to earn forgiveness but to actually earn that forgiveness for us. This he has done, a fact that is and will always be our great hope and consolation. *"By grace we have been saved, through faith"* is much more than a motto or slogan for God's people. It is the very truth by which we live. God grant that no rejection of Jesus Christ and the true nature of his life and work could ever hide from our hearts the true meaning of the cross, or diminish the peace, joy, and comfort that is there offered to mankind. Amen.

Weekly Hymn and Meditation Schedule

February 14

Hymns: 140 (1-3, 5), 149, 159

Lenten Theme:
"The Hidden
Glory of the
Cross"

*"Hidden in the
Savior's Solitude"*

Text: Luke 18:31-34

February 21

Hymns: 142 (1-3)
794, 154

Lenten Theme:
"The Hidden
Glory of the
Cross"

*"Hidden in the
Savior's Sighs"*

Text: Luke 22:39-46

February 28

Hymns: 141, 172
(1,2 & 4), 156

Lenten Theme:
"The Hidden
Glory of the
Cross"

*"Hidden in His
Rejection by the World"*

Text: John 18:33-19:1

March 6

Hymns: 155, 158
151 (1, 6-7)

Lenten Theme:
"The Hidden
Glory of the
Cross"

*"Hidden in His
Rejection by His Own"*

Text: Mat. 26:57-68

March 13

Hymns: 149, 181,
145

Lenten Theme:
"The Hidden
Glory of the
Cross"

*"Hidden in His
Powerful Words"*

Text: Luke 23:32-43

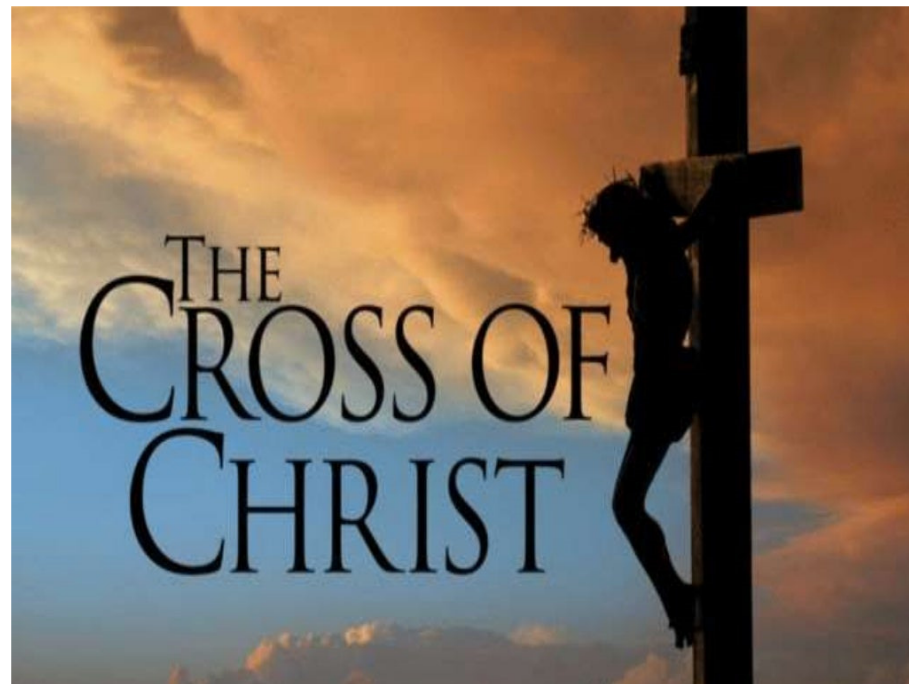
March 20

Hymns: 166, 421
171 (1, 3-7)

Lenten Theme:
"The Hidden
Glory of the
Cross"

*"Hidden in the
Savior's Stumbling"*

Text: Mark 15:17-21



Lent – 2024
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St Paul Lutheran Church
Bismarck, North Dakota

-Please return this bulletin to the Entry Table for use next week-

ST PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E Divide Ave Bismarck, ND 58501

Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

www.bismarcklutheran.org

Mick Johnson – President Angela Pfennig - Organist
Michael Roehl – Pastor

Mid-Week Lenten Services - 2024

The Opening Hymn *(As noted on the back page and on the Hymn Board)*

Invocation

Pastor: *In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

Congregation: *(Spoken) Amen.*

Confession and Absolution *(TLH 318)*

P: *Acknowledging that we stand in the presence of our Holy God we humble ourselves, and in true repentance we confess our sins:*

All: *Before Thee, God, who knowest all, with grief and shame I prostrate fall.
I see my sins against Thee, Lord, the sins of thought, of deed, and word.
They press me sore; I cry to Thee: O God, be merciful to me!*

*O Lord, my God, to Thee I pray; oh, cast me not in wrath away!
Let Thy good Spirit ne'er depart, but let Him draw to Thee my heart
That truly penitent I be: O God, be merciful to me!*

P: Jesus Christ himself has been punished for your sins. God the Father has placed upon Jesus the iniquity of us all. By His authority, and according to His command, I announce to you the divine decree of our God that all of your sins are forgiven, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

All: *O Jesus, Lord, Thy precious blood is to my soul a cleansing flood.
You turn not, Lord, Thy guest away, but grant that justified I may
Go to my house at peace with Thee: God has been merciful to me!*

The Reading of the Passion History

The Confession of Faith

(Explanation of the 2nd Article from Luther's Small Catechism, Sydow Edition)

**I believe that Jesus Christ, true God,
begotten of the Father from eternity,
and also true man,
born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord.**

**He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person,
purchased and won me from all sin, from death, and from the
power of the devil,**

**not with gold or silver,
but with His holy, precious blood
and His innocent suffering and death.**

**He did this that I should be His very own,
live under Him in His kingdom,
and serve Him in eternal righteousness, innocence, and joy;
just as He is risen from death,
lives and reigns in eternity.
This is most certainly true.**

The Pre-Sermon Hymn *(As noted on the back page, Hymn Boards, and screens)*

The Sermon *(Lenten Theme: "The Hidden Glory of the Cross")*

The Response – *(TLH Hymn 19)*

**All praise to God, who reigns above, the God of all creation,
The God of wonders, pow'r, and love, the God of our salvation!
With healing balm my soul He fills, the God who ev'ry sorrow stills,
To God all praise and glory!**

**I cried to Him in time of need: Lord God, oh, hear my calling!
For death He gave me life indeed and kept my feet from falling.
For this my thanks shall endless be; oh thank Him, thank our God
with me, To God all praise and glory!**

**Then come before His presence now and banish fear and sadness;
To your Redeemer pay your vow and sing with joy and gladness:
Though great distress my soul befell, the Lord my God, did all things
well, To God all praise and glory!**

The Prayer of the Day

The Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

P: *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
And the love of God the Father,
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

C: *(Sung by all) Amen, Amen, Amen.*

The Closing Hymn *(As noted on the back page and on the Hymn Board)*

Silent Prayer

Announcements *[All are invited to remain for fellowship and light refreshments.]*