

Third Mid-Week Lenten Worship – We Preach Christ Crucified
March 15, 2017
Philippians 3:7-11
Jesus' Cross is More Precious Than Life
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Dear friends in Christ,

How can the thematic statement for our sermon, **Jesus' Cross is More Precious Than Life**, even be true? The Roman cross was a cruel instrument of death. It was so horrific Roman citizens were exempt from its tortures. And yet Jesus felt this way. Our Lord did not save himself but died on the cross to save us. The apostle Paul felt that by becoming like Christ in death, he would attain the resurrection from the dead.

As Christians, don't we confess that Jesus' cross, his death to redeem us, is more precious than life with all the things in it? Say again these words with me in your hearts, "I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord." Unlike Paul we have not lost all things for the sake of Christ. Aren't we willing to do so?

Jesus' life was not exactly without fame early on. Our Lord experienced some heady moments during his ministry. He taught large crowds, once so large he had to get in a boat and push off a ways from the shore. The crowds delighted in his miracles and tried to make him a king. This hometown boy had the chance to stand up in his childhood synagogue and read the scroll of the prophet Isaiah.

The crowds diminished as time went by. The crowds rejected Jesus when he would not be the king of their stomachs. His old friends and neighbors answered his claims to be the servant Isaiah wrote about by planning to throw Jesus off a cliff. The events of Jesus' life were not the gauges of his success or failure; neither for him or for us.

Likely we would not, humanly speaking, include Jesus' later experiences as glorious or precious. One of his closest friends betrayed Jesus for the going price of a slave. The Roman soldiers beat him to a pulp. The Sanhedrin rejected the Christ's rightful claim as the Son of God as blasphemy. Then, they crucified the Lord of glory.

Jesus considered those moments as the most precious. They were all part of the success he would have to be our Savior. These events, as sad and humiliating as they are, were all pieces in the Father's eternal plan to redeem us from sin, death, and the devil's power. All these are events we put together into the one basket of our Savior's Passion, his suffering and death. The gauge of success was in Jesus' cross for him and for us. To Jesus, his cross was more precious than life.

Recall early in Holy Week when Jesus told his disciples, "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour?' No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name." [St. John 12:22, 28] Jesus' cross was more precious to him than life because by it his Father would glorify his name.

This was the same attitude that was in the heart of the apostle Paul. The Spirit had changed Paul's mind about what really counted. He earlier had listed some of the things he counted as precious in life: confidence in the flesh, circumcised under the law, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew among Hebrews, a Pharisee with zeal to persecute Christians, and faultless in his own righteousness. Paul had counted those things to his gain; tallies on the profit side of the ledger. Now for the sake of Christ, he considered the same things tallies on the loss side of the ledger.

Jesus' cross with all the suffering, and the resurrection from the dead that followed, Paul considered to be more precious than anything he could claim or experience in life. Earlier in his

life, Paul did not think he needed a Savior, now he knew he did. He thought his own righteousness was valuable, now he knew it was “rubbish,” literally, a word that means either the remaining part of digested food the body expels, or the garbage thrown away from the table and left over after a feast.

Paul now recognized that righteousness we have been hearing about in our lessons from Romans on Sunday and last Wednesday. “not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.”

Paul confessed that Jesus’ cross is more precious than life. The apostle was willing to suffer for Christ as Christ suffered for him; not of course to pay for his own sins but by connection to Jesus’ suffering. Connected to our Savior’s sufferings by faith, we also are connected to the power of his resurrection for our resurrection. If we become like him in death, that is consider his cross more precious than anything we have in this life, consider everything else as rubbish, then we will indeed “attain to the resurrection from the dead.” Paul took that faith to his own execution by a Roman sword.

Lent is not about me and my repentance before God. I continue to see article after article pushing that misunderstanding. Lent is about my surveying “the wondrous cross on which the Prince of glory died.” It is about seeing “from his head, his hands, his feet sorrow and love flow mingled down.” Is not that sight more precious than any and all things we have in life? Those things are not in and of themselves “rubbish.” We dare not despise the gifts our Father in heaven gives us from his grace. They are, however, things we are to “consider loss for the sake of the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord.”

The risen Christ did not blind us and throw us to the ground to change our minds like he did the apostle Paul. Someone held us in their arms, or we approached the font in faith to receive Holy Baptism that buried us with Christ into his death “in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead we too may live a new life.” [Romans 6:4]

The Holy Spirit has changed our view of things. We may sing with a convicted and happy heart “Forbid it Lord, that I should boast save in the death of Christ, my God. All the vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice them to his blood.”

How can death be better than life? It is Jesus Christ’s death. Jesus’ cross was precious to him. It was precious to Paul who wrote about it for us. Jesus’ cross is more precious than life to me. How could it be any less? Amen. <SDG>