

“The Cross @ The Crux of our Confession of Faith”
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Isaiah 51:1-6; Romans 12:1-8; Matthew 16:13-20
August 21, 2011

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! AMEN.

Last week’s Cantata lifted me to the heavens – listening, instead of participating, was an enriching experience and I’d like to thank Ben Wegner and all who were involved once again. Growing up the churches I attended in Milwaukee were rich in gifted musicians, as we are here at Jehovah. I was confirmed at the campus church for Concordia University Wisconsin and it was the site for a series of concerts by the choirs with orchestra and instruments (I played recorder and krummhorn on more than one occasion), just as the church I served in the Chicago-land area was a site for Concordia University Chicago and their choirs and Wind Symphony. Even the church where I taught in Southern Illinois came with a renowned pipe organ and our choir master was also the director for the Lutheran Hour Choir.

All those experiences came flooding back to me as we were receiving the Lord’s Supper last Sunday. The large crowd of visitors with faces of friends of Jehovah I hadn’t seen in many years, Dawn’s relatives whom I’ve been with through the deaths of siblings and their mother and grandmother – well, as the orchestra played and the strong singing of “Our God our Help in Ages Past” was taking place it was as if all those decades of worship, all the voices singing God’s praise, all the choirs and musicians – all the people of faith coming forward for forgiveness and assurance of salvation in the body and blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – it all washed over me. I am not accustomed to such a flood of emotion. I sang with my siblings at our parents’ funerals as I have soloed for my dear Uncle Fred, Aunt Francie and so many others.

It was as if a flood of forgiveness – a flood of God’s grace was washing down the aisle as Donna Friedmann and I stood in front of the baptismal font to distribute the Lord’s Supper. I apologize for weeping. I was quite unprepared for the strength of those emotions. Perhaps it was the sudden deaths of 3 people in my life this past summer: 61, 42 and 32, but the assurance of forgiveness and salvation and the heavenly chorus of God’s people in worship left me a “puddle” – but I think in a good way.

Peter is no “puddle” in our text. Quite the opposite he is a “Rock” – not like Dwayne Johnson of WWF/WWE wrestling and acting fame, no Simon Peter makes a foundational rock of a confession of faith after Jesus asks the ultimate question, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” Peter has just witnessed the signs of feeding of thousands, walked and sunk on the waves before Jesus hauled his soggy self up and put him back in the boat and stilled a storm. It is no wonder that he answers, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God” – well, no wonder to us, but it was, after all, blasphemy – the kind you could get buried under a pile of rocks for, but none of the others stepped up to disagree (that is no wonder – they’d all seen the same signs and Nathaniel/Bartholomew whose Feast Day is this very day had said the same thing the very first time he’d met Jesus when he was called to be a disciple. Simply hearing from Jesus that he’d miraculously seen him praying under a fig tree had turned Nate from one who wondered, “What good can come from Nazareth?” to confessing, “You are the Messiah, the one sent from God”).

That had been 3 years earlier when Jesus had just begun His ministry – now they are on the road to Jerusalem where Jesus will suffer and die for the sins of all people of all time, theirs, yours and mine. Peter’s answer is not vague, he doesn’t say, “You’re a great teacher, I hope people will follow all that you’ve taught.” He doesn’t say, “You’re my co-pilot, I’m glad you’re beside me and I know you’ll ‘take the wheel’ if I start to veer off-track.” (OK, they didn’t have cars with steering wheels but I think you catch my drift).

No! At that moment and at no small risk to himself, Peter came to “The Cross @ The Crux,” with the confession only God the Father in Heaven could have revealed to Him. What you and I believe that can only be revealed to us by the power of the Holy Spirit by the gift of faith through baptism, at the table, and in God’s Word, that Jesus is the Messiah—the One anointed (chosen) to die for us. Yes, in The Cross is the Crux of our Confession of Faith.

Long ago one of my teachers told us never to use the same word to define a word. But I just did. The word “cross” and “crux” are the same thing, only the first is English, the second is Latin. But what I’m trying to say is this: the crux of our existence as God’s chosen and dearly loved children by faith is the point where all the past and all the future come together, where we discover who we are and what we’re here for – what we are to be about.

Those who do not know Jesus, who do not come by faith to see in the cross and empty tomb forgiveness and salvation, are left with an eternity crushing identity crisis, not knowing Whose they are, Who they are or Why they are here. That is why people grab for “Something spiritual” and we are surrounded by crystals, cults that promise personal power, mantras and a vague “spirituality” that seems to have taken over societies throughout the world. You don’t have to look further than the greeting card section of any store, the one labeled “religious” to see what has become of our society’s sense of the spiritual, Oh, you’ll find a couple of crosses there, but I have never, once, found a cross card that said “Jesus died for you.” I suppose people find that too grim but there and only there is where the Cross of the Christ and the crux of human need for now and eternity come together.

That’s the rock on which Jesus said He would build His Church; not on Peter, the strong-willed, weak-kneed disciple and certainly not on Peter’s words, but on the revelation those words contained: Jesus came to save us. Leave out the cross and it’s like tossing a rope to a drowning man that isn’t tied to anything else.

Jochen Teuffel – a pastor, wrote in Thursday Theology, “ What threatens Christianity’s existence among us is (not Islam) [or anything else, for that matter] but the fact that people (today) do not really believe in (Jesus as the Christ/Messiah)the One who gave Christianity its name, nor trust His message or His work. Unlike unbelieving Thomas, people are unwilling to put their finger to Jesus’ wounds (by faith) and thereby come to trust the crucified and risen Lord.”

Christianity is not a set of principles or ideas or philosophies, it is and can only be linked person to person: from Jesus to each one of us - Jesus, our hope in ages past, our hope for years to come, our shelter from the stormy past and our eternal home. His cross is at the crux of our lives, not even hell can stand against us. We live. We die. And we live again for all eternity in Jesus, the Christ, our Messiah. Amen.

Now may God our strong foundation who forms us into one body through Jesus, His Son, encourage, enable and empower that we may gladly minister to all the world.