

“Do You Ever Get Tired of Carrying That All Alone?”
Holy Cross Sunday
September 14, 2014
John 3: 13-17

This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it! The texts for this Holy Cross Sunday are the lessons which were just read.

Holy Cross Sunday – where did that Festival come from you may ask? The roots are in the 4th Century when Empress Helena, the mother of the Emperor Constantine went to the rebuilt Jerusalem (rebuilt by the Romans after they had totally destroyed it in 70 AD/CE). She was on a quest to find, in the centuries old ruins, relics from the time of Christ and came upon 3 crosses, one of which she was certain was the very cross on which Jesus had been crucified . In no time at all there were enough splinters and tiny pieces from that supposed very cross upon which Jesus died to construct cathedrals –a veritable forest of fragments! There are, no doubt, scalpers today in Jerusalem who will be happy to let you part with some of your money for what they will assure you is a piece of the very cross on which Jesus died.

Well that sounds like a bunch of *Fol de rol and fiddle dee dee* to me as I’m sure it does to you, but there was more to this celebration – so much more that it was added to the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod’s calendar in 1982 with the publishing of Lutheran Worship. To parody the song *Try to Remember* from the Fantasticks we’ll change “Deep in December” to “ In the midst of September our hearts should remember the price that was paid on the cross and follow, follow, follow.”

It is roughly six months since Good Friday and six months until we are once again at the foot of the cross to reflect on and remember the sacrifice that was made to pay for all our sins past, present and future. It is important to remember – to reflect on the blood bounty that was paid for the sins of all humanity and then to bear/wear/proclaim the foolishness of God’s only-begotten Son dying as a ransom, and having found there the priceless treasure of forgiveness and salvation to call others to repentance and faith that through the work of the Holy Spirit they, too, might find salvation and as fellow disciples follow.

Oh it is as true now as it was when Paul wrote to the Corinthians that “the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” Contrary to what some people think it has never really been otherwise – oh, there may

have been times throughout the centuries when there was more societal support for proclaiming the cross of Christ alone for salvation but it has never been easy – Jesus never promised that it would be. Dissent within and without our own families and the family of faith were promised but along with that Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would come and fill us with fruits of joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self-control but, if we're honest we get picky about what fruits we really want as we journey together as pilgrims headed toward our eternal home. More than that we get stingy about whom we will share God's love with – not only to which of the lost are worthy but who in the body of Christ deserves patience, kindness, goodness etc. Mother Theresa said something profound about this:

People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered.

Forgive them anyway.

If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives.

Be kind anyway.

If you are successful, you will win some unfaithful friends and some genuine enemies.

Succeed anyway.

If you are honest and sincere people may deceive you.

Be honest and sincere anyway.

What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight. Create anyway.

If you find serenity and happiness, some may be jealous.

Be happy anyway.

The good you do today, will often be forgotten. Do good anyway.

Give the best you have, and it will never be enough.

Give your best anyway.

In the final analysis, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway.

Wear/bear/share the cross of Christ – that unlikely symbol that was the ultimate object of scorn at the time of Christ. Only the very worst of criminals –the worst of murderers, terrorists and subversives, those who took lives or goods without much thought or remorse died on a cross. Death on a cross was a despicable way to die- the person was displayed shamefully naked – a display of suffering unimaginable and often left to rot and be eaten by scavenging birds and animals for all who couldn't help but look that horror – like a “train wreck” to remember - remember the brutal justice and power of Rome. To think that an instrument of torture should become an object of victory, a beacon of hope for all people, for all nations. To think that the Son of God was lifted high upon a shameful cross in the ultimate sacrifice so that He might draw all the women, men and children of all times past, present and future to Himself, for life, for salvation, for companionship in this pilgrimage on earth – well that is truly as unlikely as a bronze serpent hung on a pole giving healing and life to stubborn Israelites who

time and again, like we ourselves, refused to turn to God and live. The foreshadowing matched the reality but the wholeness and healing is eternal.

The cross – an instrument of death that gives us new and eternal life because “God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world;” did not come as a powerful ruler to force all people and all nations to turn in fear and trembling to be ruled by God in compulsion as some of the Israelites would have preferred, no God did not send His son into the world to condemn the world but that, through Him the world might be saved.”

Crosses – I used to think I saw a glut of them as bling but with the popularity of tattoos they are, literally, everywhere you look. I’ve been working at seeing the cross thusly displayed as a witness – as a “shout out” if you would so that all might do as Isaiah prophesied – all might turn to the Messiah - "Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth, for I am God and there is no other." I try in each display of the cross to pray that the witness of the cross will turn those whose faith is weak or unsure to “Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

There is no power but the power of the cross that can show us our need for God - the sacrifice there was so senseless, so tragically unjust, so incredibly beautiful in it's gruesome horror as the love of God showed itself to you and me – the ones deserving punishment for all we’ve done and left undone that " while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" - died for you and for me.

The cross - it unites all who stand beneath it by faith. All the work that needed to be done to pay for sin was done there - but there is still a task in which we are privileged and called to participate – sharing the power, the foolishness, the wisdom of Christ so that, souls converted to the faith by the power of the Holy Spirit might be nurtured, encouraged and strengthened in the faith throughout all of their lives God desires for all to learn and grow in the Word and in faith throughout life – as children, teens, twenty-thirty-forty-fifty-sixty-seventy-eighty or ninety somethings. Last week we had a whole table of Bible Study options available for personal use – a whole list of opportunities online for daily devotions – links to studies from our seminary, written or for listening as excellent professors teach about the Christian faith. Women’s Bible Study begins this Wednesday at 6:30. Next week at 9:30 am the ABCClass begins a study of “The Psalms and Life in God’s Creation.” On October 19th our Sunday worship will focus on God’s

gift to us in the world God created – and our responsibility to care for our world. An adult membership class begins Sunday September 28th in my office unless so many come that we need to move to a larger space (wouldn't that be wonderful!). In November and December there will be a number of opportunities to gather around God's Word to learn more about "God's Story." Why gather together? Well, to be honest, we gather in worship, we gather together in Bible Study and fellowship to remember that we don't wear/bear/share the cross of Christ alone. Have you ever wished someone would notice you look strained, ask you how you're doing and then really listen to you about the burdens you bear; to say with compassion, "Do You Ever Get Tired of Carrying That All Alone?"

Many years ago a friend was visiting 85 year old Albert Schweitzer at his jungle hospital in Lambarene, Africa. As they walked in the equatorial sun that beat down mercilessly, Dr. Schweitzer suddenly left the group and went over to the slope of a hill where a woman was struggling to carry a huge load of firewood up the steep incline. Dr. Schweitzer took the entire load, carried it up the hill and then rejoined the group. One of the party asked him why he did such things, especially at his age. Schweitzer looked him in the eye and said, "No one should have to carry a burden like that alone."

In the midst of September it's time to remember to look to the cross and follow, follow, follow – together, never alone.

AMEN