

A Homily upon the Observance of Holy Cross Day
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In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (1 Cor. 1:25). Oh, how true this is, dear friends. God’s ways are indeed foolish according to our sinful human reason. His plan of salvation is utterly ridiculous in the eyes of the world. Already the Israelites in the wilderness learned how absurd God’s ways are. For when they were afflicted with serpents, God didn’t send them a medicinal antidote, but ordered Moses to “make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live” (Num. 21:8). This, of course, foreshadowed the ultimate foolishness of God which would happen on a hill outside the gates of Jerusalem some time later, when God Himself, incarnate in human flesh, allowed men to pound nails through His hands and feet and hang Him on a cross to die.

No wonder the world mocks and ridicules Christianity. No wonder they think Christians are a little “off.” We believe that God Himself came down from heaven to be born of a virgin. That the Almighty Creator of all things would enter the world in the human flesh of a baby is “crazy talk” to the world, not to mention the absurdity of His being born of a virgin. But, what’s even crazier in the world’s eyes is that we believe that this same God took on human flesh, so that He could live the perfect life in place of sinful humanity, and so that He could pay the price for the sins of all people of all time by dying on the cross. Yes, that’s right, Christians believe that the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, the eternal Word of the Father, the Son of God, Jesus the Christ, became Flesh and dwelled among us to die in our place, for our sins.

It is foolishness, we have to admit it. It doesn’t compute, doesn’t make sense to our sinful human reason. But, “the foolishness of God is wiser than men.” God’s ways are not our ways; His thoughts are not our thoughts. The cross is folly to the world. It is scandalous. It is a stumbling block. But, more than that, it is detestable in the eyes of the world, for the world wants a nice religion where no one has to die and everyone is saved, regardless of what they believe. It wants a religion where the better you behave in this life, the more blessings you will receive from God, but also a religion where nobody has to suffer eternally for sin. It wants a religion that echoes the wisdom of this world and follows its principles. It wants a religion where a cross is unnecessary.

The world would be able to tolerate the “silliness” of Christianity if Christianity would only give up its exclusive claims. It would welcome the cross, as foolish as it is, if it was conceded that the cross is only one of many paths to salvation. But, alas, Christianity cannot concede this. The cross is the only way. For the One who hung on the cross for the sin of the world declares, “I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6).

There’s the rub, my friends. There’s the reason the world hates Christianity. Not only is it viewed as foolishness, but also as stubborn, intolerant, and arrogant. The world simply cannot abide a religion which claims to have the only way to eternal salvation.

But, let us not be moved, dear friends. Let us not buckle under the pressure of the world. Let us continue to put the cross front and center, “for the cross alone is our theology,” as Dr. Luther put it long ago. The cross is the focus of all true Christian worship. The cross is the “hour” for which our Lord Jesus Christ came into the world. The cross is where the glory of God is fully revealed. The cross is where our sins are taken away and forgiveness, life, and salvation are won for us by the holy, innocent Blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

A cross-less religion will not do. The cross is necessary, for there is the once-for-all sacrifice for sin completed. There, on the cross, our salvation is finished. There, on the cross, is our redemption.

Look there, O Christian. Never stop looking to the cross. There is your answer. There are your sins taken away. There is the fulfillment of the fiery serpent set on a pole in the wilderness. All who are bitten by the serpent and infected with the poison of sin, which includes every human being born of Adam, when they gaze upon the cross in faith, shall live, now and forever.

Foolishness? Yes! So be it! The cross is God's way, not ours; His plan of salvation, not ours. And, whether the world likes it or not, the cross is the only way to salvation, for there is the only Blood shed that can take away our sins. Therefore, let us unashamedly preach Christ Crucified. With St. Paul, let us be "determined not to know anything among us, save Jesus Christ and Him Crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). May the Holy Spirit open our eyes of faith to see through the foolishness of the cross, that we may recognize the power of God in all His glory revealed on Calvary's holy mountain for sinners like you and me. In Jesus' Holy and Precious Name. Amen.

In Christ,

Rev. Thomas C. Messer, Pastor

Peace Lutheran Church ~ Alma, MI

www.peacealma.org ~ (989) 463-5754

You may contact Pastor Messer by calling the church or by email: pastor@peacealma.org