**We Preach Christ Crucified**

**1 Corinthians 1:18-25**

**& John 12:20-33**

Holy Cross Day – 09.13.2023

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today, September 14, is called Holy Cross Day. It has historically been celebrated since 335 AD. There are even some intriguing legends that date back to that time. For example, there is the legend that St. Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine, went on an archaeological expedition to Jerusalem to discover the precise location of the crucifixion of our Lord. The legend continues that three crosses were unearthed and to determine which was the true cross, each was touched by a dying woman – one of them healed her.

While Helena’s involvement is not 100% verifiable, nor is the legend of the healing, the date of the feast marks the dedication of the [Church of the Holy Sepulchre](http://www.ask.com/wiki/Church_of_the_Holy_Sepulchre?qsrc=3044) in 335. During this two-day festival, the church was consecrated on September 13. The cross which was discovered on the site of the crucifixion was brought outside the church on September 14 so that the clergy and faithful could pray before the True Cross.

Legends and stories abound, let them. While we are not going to bow down and kiss the cross, we do allow the Scripture to speak to us and give us an appropriate attitude toward the cross on this special day of commemoration. There is a hymn in *Lutheran Service Book*, #454, which in the fourth verse which gives us an idea of how we should think of the cross. *Faithful cross, thou sign of triumph, Now for us the noblest tree, None in foliage, none in blossom, None in fruit thy peer may be; Symbol of the world’s redemption, For the weight that hung on thee!*

But, it did not take until 335 AD for God’s faithful to think of the cross with such high regard. Paul says in our Epistle lesson: *For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but* ***we preach Christ crucified****, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

In fact, while not in our Epistle lesson for today, Paul continues in the very next chapter, *And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. 2 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.* (1 Cor. 2;1-2)

And why is the cross, and specifically Christ crucified the only thing we preach? Christ answers that question in our Gospel lesson, “Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

Just as Jesus says, judgment against the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh is carried out when Christ is lifted up – that is, when He is crucified.

It is this that we hate. We do not like to think of ourselves as having to need someone to die in our place. We do not like to think that we are such sinners that we are not good enough in God’s eyes. It is why there are so many preachers out there telling people to try harder and to do better, because they themselves see Jesus dying only as a way to show us how to love our neighbor.

The 2nd person of the Trinity gave His life on the cross – God died to remove sin. No man could please God on His own. It is why the cross looks weak. That God would die for sinner is foolishness to Gentiles, and a stumbling block for Jews. Christ crucified removes all self-righteousness. It shows we are helpless in sin.

Dear friends, that is why we celebrate Holy Cross Day today. It is in the crucifixion that forgiveness is purchased and salvation accomplished. As Paul pointed out, the crucifixion only ***LOOKS*** like weakness.

But that is wrong! This seeming weakness of a God crucified is a victory! It is your victory! It is my victory!

How that victory is ours is explained by Paul in his letter to the Romans. We are baptized into Christ’s death in order that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also would be raised to a new life – a new life now and forever.

My good friend, Pastor Stuckwisch of South Bend wrote this about the celebration of Holy Cross Day. *This festival invites an appropriate and salutary focus on the Cross as the means by which our Lord Jesus Christ atoned for the sins of the world, defeated death and the devil, reconciled the world to God, obtained our salvation and glorified the Father’s name. Though His Cross is a foolish scandal to the world, to us who are being saved it is the power and wisdom of God, unto salvation. Thus, with St. Paul, we know nothing but the Cross, preach nothing but the Cross, and boast in nothing but the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. For it is by His Cross that we are crucified, dead, and buried with Him in Holy Baptism and in daily repentance. It is from the same Cross that we receive the absolution or forgiveness of all our sins, by which we also rise with Christ unto newness of life. This Cross is lifted up and exalted in our lives by self-sacrificing love for our neighbor, as it is first of all lifted up for us by the preaching of the Gospel, by which we are drawn to Christ in faith and through Him, our great High Priest, brought into the holy of holies made without hands, to our Father in heaven.*

Dearly beloved of God, Holy Cross Day is another opportunity for the Cross of Christ to be portrayed before our very eyes, preached into our ears, planted in our hearts, and proclaimed with the very lips that have received His Body and His Blood, sacrificed for us upon the Cross, given and poured out for us in the Feast by which His holy and life-giving Cross is commemorated, and by which this holy day is celebrated.

So we rejoice this day, as we do every time we gather together, that Christ was lifted up upon the cross, gave His life unto death, and was raised by His Father on the third day, that we might be lifted up unto eternal life in His Kingdom.

In Christ crucified we have forgiveness.

In Christ crucified we are given a new life now and forevermore.

It is for this reason my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, that like Paul, I am determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. Amen.