

Holy Cross Day – 2025
Numbers 21:4-9
1 Corinthians 1:18-25
John 12:20-33

Adam heard a brutal word on the day that he fell. With forbidden fruit still stuck in his teeth, with the fruit of rebellion turning sour in his belly, Adam heard God's righteous judgment. "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19). Adam's name means "of the earth." He was created from the dust of the earth and death will return him thence. It is poetically brutal. Adam is our earthly father. Eve is our earthly mother. There is a universality to our human race. Death is your enemy. Death is a cruel overlord. Death is foreign to God's creation, a catastrophic alteration of God's living design.

My ways are not your ways, declares the Lord (Isaiah 55:8). Isn't that the truth! "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9). The most powerful emblem in this world is a cross. A cross is not a symbol of elite superiority. A cross is a brutal instrument of torture and shame. When Jesus spoke of bearing one's cross it elicited a visceral reaction from His audience. His contemporaries were confused as to how something so repellant could be a blessing, a mark of devotion to God. What do you see when you look at the cross, any cross? I suspect that most of you would say "love" and that's good, that's true. Love is there to be seen. Some of you would say victory or sacrifice or forgiveness – those are all there as well, all embedded in the cross, all embedded there for you.

Jesus said that "unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). "Fall into the earth and dies" immediately brings to mind Adam. God's way is so completely different from anything that the world would fabricate to solve our problem. Jesus is the second, greater Adam, the new man who would address death, who would confront death – death which is external to us and death which is internal to us. Jesus reverses the fall of man.

We've all been rattled this week – distressed, sorrowful, angered and deflated. Senseless killing, murderous hatred, hostility that reaches out and steals life, robbing a wife, robbing children – it is twisted and bent and so very sad. Many live as enemies of the cross of Christ (Philippians 3:18). The Son of God takes our nature, takes our curse, falls the ground in death to reclaim humanity for the Father and the unbelieving world hates Him for it. As Isaiah said: "I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5). How many pastors across our land will quote our Lord this morning, saying "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you" (John 15:18-19). When we speak out against the world's profane philosophy the world will hate us. What's the alternative? According to some, we must go along with any deluded notion regarding sexuality that man devises. For two-thousand years the church has said this: "We must obey God rather than men!" (Acts 5:29).

We *will* hold to Christ's teaching. We *will* speak the truth in love. We *will* take the log out of our own eye before helping our brother with the speck in his. We *will* die to self. We *will* cling to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (Galatians 6:14). Some will never understand. "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" (1 Corinthians 1:18). Jesus saw His approaching death and He knew what it meant for Him. He was adamant that we should follow Him. Loving our lives in this world is not following Him. Disregarding the Divine Service is not following Him. Failing to love our neighbor is not following Him.

We are a different sort of people. We love those who hate us. We pray for those who persecute us. Does the cross of Christ teach you to love only those who love you? Does the cross of Christ teach you to harbor hatred in your heart? Does the cross of Christ teach you to forgive only those who deserve it – whatever "deserving it" means? We are a different sort of people. We abandon the world's self-obsessed religion. God's ways became your ways the day that you were baptized. The cross is the emblem of the Greatest who became the least. You probably have an idea in your head of what God's glory entails. Power, dominion, raw holiness – we all have a picture in our head of the Moses standing before the burning bush, of the angels appearing to the shepherds around Bethlehem, of Jesus being transfigured on the mountain. God's glory – what picture do you have in your mind?

Jesus was distressed by what He saw approaching. The ferocity of evil being unleashed on a passive sacrifice – the Lord Christ saw it coming. Bearing the weight of humanity's sin – the Lord Christ saw it coming. Suffering the Father's wrath against lust and greed and pride and deceit and murderous hatred – the Lord Christ saw it coming. The whole purpose of Jesus' life was about to be realized. He is profoundly loyal to His Father. He sees the harvest that will stem from His sacrifice. He sees you, this Divine Service, and His church in its totality. He's locked in. His spirit is determined, unwavering. "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name" (John 12:27-28). What is Jesus asking for? He is asking for His Father to lift Him up on the cross. The glory of God is tethered inextricably to the sacrifice of the Son of God on the Holy Cross. The picture in your mind of God's glory is to be a crucified Savior. "Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to the Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 22-24).

I am delighted that our teachers are here this morning, my fellow workers in this fruitful vineyard of Christ the King. Chapel is a vibrant, happy time in our beautiful school. The Gospel is why there is a school here. Through the years I have established a set of lessons, lessons that mostly follow the church year. The teachers can attest to this – invariably, near the end of whatever is the lesson for that day, I will grab this crucifix and hold it aloft. Who is this? What is He doing? Why is He dying? The cross is the only reason why we have chapel. The Holy Cross of Christ is the only reason why we are here this morning, the only reason there is a church, the only reason we know God's glory. Truth, goodness, beauty, wisdom, hope, and faith – we are soldiers of the cross and we have seen the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6). Love sets us apart. Our sins have been paid for, and we have been redeemed from death and hell. Our enemies were defeated as our Lord hung on the tree, high and exalted –

and they are still defeated. Hate is judged and vanquished and has no power (John 1:5; Colossians 2:15). Satan's head is crushed and death has no sting (Genesis 3:15; 1 Corinthians 15:55). The cross is holy. The cross is life. We look to Jesus and know that our lives have meaning. We know that He is at work among us (John 5:17). We know that the grave is shattered. He is risen! We are children of Easter, children of the resurrection (1 Thessalonians 5:5). Light and life to all He brings; ris'n with healing in His wings. All hail the power of Jesus' name. All hail the glory of Jesus' cross.