

March 12/13, 2013  
John 19:16-18

Midweek Lent 5  
Names of Wondrous Love-Christ Crucified

*Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our Lenten King. Amen.*

I want to ask you all a serious question tonight. What does the Cross mean? Think about it. Well it all depends on who you might ask. To many, it's merely an ornament to be worn around the neck, in the ear, or perhaps even put up on the wall. TO the architect, it's a symbol to be used when designing a house of worship. To the skeptic, it's a superstition that clouds human minds. To the communist, it's a narcotic, an opiate for the people to numb their needs. To the Roman, it was an instrument of torture, devilishly simple, but horribly painful. To the Sanhedrin, it was a token of victory that was, at best, short lived. To the motley crew on Calvary, it was a holiday, carnal and cursed. To one thief, it was his door to hell, horrible and eternal. TO the other thief, it was the gate to heaven and more than he ever dared pray for. It all depends on who's looking at the cross.

More important is the question, What does the cross mean to us? Hopefully we would answer that it's the blessed of what our Savior came to do for us. It's the altar where the God-man sacrificed himself in payment for the sins of the world. It's the crown of our salvation, gleaming brightly with the news of how Christ loved us and washed us from our sins with his own blood. For us too, as for the Apostle Paul, there is no greater message than that of the cross, the message of Christ crucified.

Today in our series of sermons, Names of Wondrous Love, we look at that word *crucified*. Perhaps, it's more of a term than a name, yet we so often link it with his name, Christ.

It's his Name of Wondrous Love – Christ Crucified. Crucified because of our sins, Crucified for our salvation.

“There they crucified him,” it says, just four simple words in our translation. But there was nothing simple or brief about it. We shudder as we picture Jesus laid on that cross, his lacerated back pushed against the rough wood. His hands stretched out and held on the cross bar. His feet roughly positioned one on top of the other. We shrink back as we hear the dull strokes of the hammer pounding spikes through his quivering flesh and the dull thud as the cross with its hapless victim is raised in the air and then dropped into the supporting hole in the ground. The crucifying is done rather quickly, and now the dying begins, but oh, so so slow! Normally hours would go by, even days, as the victim would hang dying on that cross, his hands torn deeper and deeper by relentless nails, his body wracked by burning thirst, constant pain, throbbing torture. No Roman citizen or respected person was ever to be subjected to this shameful, slow death by crucifixion. That was a torture reserved for the worst of criminals AND GOD'S SON.

Far worse than the physical pain were the tortures of hell that God's Son endured that day! All the bitter dregs in the cup of the world's sins, all the terrible curses that are due to the world's sins, all the pangs of death and the pains of hell that are the wages of the world's sins, all this fell with staggering, crushing force on God's Son as he hung as a criminal on that accursed cross. We can't even begin to plumb the depths of hell's suffering he endured on that cross. Only the devils and the damned in hell can understand God's Son anguished cry, "My GOD, My God, why have you forsaken me?" "There they crucified him," it says so simply. But how can we imagine the ocean of suffering this involved, crashing wave after wave after wave over him on the cross that day?

We can only guess at the suffering involved in that simple word *crucified*. We do not have to guess, however, at the "they" who crucified him. Certainly the soldiers were involved, the ones who handled the hammer and manhandled his flesh. Now they sit beneath his cross, drinking their cheap wine, casting lots for his clothing, throwing bits of sarcasm at him. Behind those soldiers, back in his palace, stands a cowardly and selfish Pontius Pilate, trying vainly to wash innocent blood off his hands with water. Behind him prowl the chief priests and the Jewish People in their blind hatred choosing Barabbas and crucifying their only Savior.

There are even more involved in the "they" who crucified him. In the distance lies Judas, himself now a corpse. Weeping in the darkness is Peter, repentant and forgiven, indeed, but guilty of denial and cowardice. And there farther back, back where we look only reluctantly stand even more. DO you see them? I asked: DO YOU SEE THEM? There they stand—men, women, teenagers, and children of all classes and conditions, but having one thing in common. They all bear the stamp and stain of sin. And among them, if we look closely enough, there we see them...ourselves, our spouses, our children, our neighbors, our friends, our pastor and congregational leaders, sinners one and all, and all are included in the "they" who crucified him.

It needs to become even more direct than this. Tonight each of us looking into his own heart and at his own life needs to confess, "Ah! I also and my sin wrought your deep affliction; this indeed the cause has been of your crucifixion." Yes it needs to become these very words..."I CRUCIFIED HIM."

I don't think we want to stop today with just the thought of our guilt. What comfort can "Jesus crucified by me" bring for sinners like you and me? We surely want to look again at his cross, this time not to see who put him there but to see why he stayed there. Not the nails, not the soldiers, not the crowd, but his wondrous love held him there. The cross brings the blessed truth, the saving truth that we need so desperately, the truth that it's "Christ crucified FOR me."

The Bible spells out this glorious truth again and again, in passage after passage, clearly and plainly. Yes, "he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities:" but the prophet also reminds us, "By his wounds we are healed." "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness

of God,” Paul sums up for us. “The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin,” John assures us. These are just a few of the passages. Today, in summary of this saving truth, we look at the cross. It has quite a story to tell. It speaks of full payment for the world’s sins. It speaks, it shouts, of full payment for your sins, and mine. It’s a throne of wondrous love for my Savior, Christ Crucified.

Down through the ages since Calvary that cross has stood in invitation to sinners. Countless thousands have heard the crucified Christ invite through Word and sacrament, “Whoever comes to me I will never drive away”. You and I have received this glorious invitation so many times in our lives that it perhaps doesn’t seem so grand anymore. We’ve heard about that wondrous Savior from sin so often that we might be tempted to respond, “So, what else is new?” So many voices are competing for our ears today. We have to make a living, hold a job, keep the business going. We have to pay the bills, keep up with the mortgage, balance the checkbook. We have to raise the kids, keep them out of trouble, get them educated, get them to be the best athlete they can be, and then get them married off. We have to relax a little, have some fun, get rid of some tension. Life is so complex, no doubt about it, and in the static of this complex world, the sound of Jesus’ voice offering his simple, sweet invitation to sinners can so quickly be drowned out.

This Lenten season it’s back-to-the-cross time. It’s time to kneel beneath the cross, confessing our sins and then rejoicing in his forgiveness. It’s time to marvel again at the wondrous love behind those words, “Christ Crucified for me.” Amen.

*Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior, our Lenten King. Amen.*