

The Crucified Lamb of God

What does boundless love look like? How far will love go even in the face of great sacrifice? We know that God is love – the author of love and the essence of unlimited love. But times were tough when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Herod was on a rampage and the inhumanity of man was on full display. It has remained on display in every generation since Eden. It is on display now and it is heart breaking and brutal!

God sees all of this and acts with a powerful and dramatic act of love! This is not an easy task. It was going to hurt – really hurt! I must have had an old-time dentist years ago when I had a wisdom tooth removed because he said, “I can’t sugar coat this – it’s going to hurt.” Those are words we don’t like to hear – so, modern dentistry and some surgery goes to great lengths to take away some of the pain. Now we hear what we want to hear – “this will only sting for a second or it will only hurt a little.” We are all thankful for painkillers, sedatives and power drugs that provide numbing to reduce or even eliminate pain. Most people accept or request painkillers – even if it costs a bit more!

Yet, painkillers are not always possible when everything is at stake. Last Wednesday was Ash Wednesday – a cross was placed on our foreheads with ashes as a very personal symbol of our mortality and what Jesus did to take away the sting of death. It is from dust we came and to which we shall return. While we hopefully do all that we can to demonstrate love – even sacrificial love to our family, friends and beyond, we do not have the capacity to resolve satan’s global pandemic of sin and we don’t have a human painkiller to take away the sting of death.

God does have that capacity, but there was no tranquilizer for the cross. It was on the cross He suffered. Our Lord accepted difficult suffering and excruciating pain because of His love for us and to pay a debt we could or would never be able to pay. That was the full price and Jesus suffered the hurtful cost! The price was way out of our league.

“Lamb of God, pure and holy”—is our theme hymn for this season. Tonight, our attention shifts to the next line of the hymn: **“who on the cross didst suffer.”** It was a long time ago and far away! We have known about our Lord’s bitter suffering since childhood and even though it is the very heart of the Gospel it is hard for us to really fathom, contemplate or even appreciate. When we confess our sins we pray, **“..[Out] of Your boundless mercy and for the sake of the holy, innocent bitter suffering and death...be merciful to me...”** The apostle Paul brings the cross into sharper focus so that we may unflinchingly ponder the astonishing depth of what it means that Jesus mercifully became the victim and even be forsaken by His Father that we might have forgiveness.

The price for victory over sin means God entering into our harsh and conflicted world that puts Jesus on the cross. The huge price of love was necessary because of the depth of our sinfulness. As we think deeply about it we may find it troubling or even foolish for God to be so merciful. In fact, it is the most amazing thing we know while at the same time the most difficult part of the Gospel.

There is a certain edge to the Gospel as Paul describes it. “A stumbling block” and “foolishness” are the words he uses to identify the preaching of Christ crucified. It is hard to take in let alone comprehend. Even though we were all signed with the cross a week ago, we have now washed it off. That’s fine but this Lenten season we pray,

**“Lord, “On my heart imprint Your image, Blessed Jesus, King of grace,
That life’s riches cares and pleasures Never your work erase;
Let the clear inscription be: Jesus crucified for me,
Is my life, my hope’s foundation, and my glory and salvation.**

We take the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross to heart never to be erased. We do not take it lightly because it is our life, hope, glory and salvation. While we have cross jewelry and plenty of crosses here in church, we know that the cross symbolizes much, much more than a nice ornamental addition to our dress or architecture.

The cross is a symbol of how hard God works and how His excruciating sacrifice was for our salvation. It is a symbol of the depth of God's love for us and of our absolute need for such sacrifice. We all like the signs and miracles Jesus did – the Jews wanted signs and Greeks wanted miracles. Water into wine, raising the dead, healing the sick -great! The idea of Jesus as the divine superhero fits with human wisdom. Dying on a cross – not so much. The cross seems like defeat not victory, but **we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, and a lot of other people, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ crucified is the power of God's love.** Here we see the generous wisdom of God mercifully paying forward what we could not even dream about - forgiveness.

For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength. We might wish for an easier solution to our mortality, but we understand that **God's ways are not man's ways.** The world has a wisdom of its own, and that "wisdom" flies in the face of God's wisdom. Human logic is great but God's mercy transcends simple logic. We make sacrifices for children and family members driven by love – not logic. What we see on the cross is more than logic – its love in action! God's **mercy moves beyond logic to redemption.** God is bigger than human understanding. His judgments are unsearchable and His ways inscrutable. We like things explained in simple easy terms, but no one can know the mind of the Lord or serve as His counselor (Romans 11:33–34), for He is the almighty Creator of heaven and earth.

Yet misguided people insist on measuring God by a human yardstick and in the simplest terms. We like simplicity and we like control. How many times have we insisted on doing something OUR WAY and it flopped? People keep insisting that they want things their way, but their way is not God's way. There is a reason for that. The world's way certainly seems easier but it leads to death, while God's way alone leads to life. Even when we pretend to know it all – we know we don't. Adam and Eve started us down this path! They - did it their way - that seemed to make more sense, rather than trusting the Word and wisdom of God. All of mankind since the fall of Adam experience the process of dying. That is what human wisdom will get you—a plot in a graveyard.

God's wisdom leads not to death but to life—life eternal. Not that you would know it up front. God in His wisdom makes Himself vulnerable to rescue a world headed for a crash landing. In the face of logic Jesus acted with divine mercy. The Master plan was not a fool's errand, but God's action that is **not easier, but powers us to Easter!**

It seems like an outlandish idea by any human standard. On the way to Easter was the bitter struggle on Calvary and the cry to the Father, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" Why? For you and me! For a troubled world full of the chaos of sin and mankind's in humanity to man. Humanity's way to try to fix things always includes wars and rumors of war generation after generation

The crucified Lamb of God may not be trendy or easy but is the path to Easter. When we are tempted to think of sin but lightly, we recall the cross on Calvary. Does God care about the sin going on in us and in our world? Look at the cross. There the pure and holy Lamb of God was made to be sin for us; and as the sin-bearer He bore the just penalty of our sin.

When you were baptized, you were signed with a cross, to mark you as belonging to Christ the crucified - never to be erased! Then and there God embraced you with His eternal love and set you free to live a new life that is forever, for sure and for you! This is how much God loves you!
Amen