

Holy Cross Day
1 Corinthians 1:18-24

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day. AMEN.

Back in 1918 a woeful young man with his head down, hands slouched in his pockets, feet shuffling along slipped through the night towards a river front in New York City. He was heading that way to visit the taverns and drown his sorrow. He was heading that way to forget, to put an end to the voices in his head and just perhaps if he had enough courage to put an end to it all. Then as the man was walking along he heard a man's voice exclaim, "Crucified! They crucified him!"

The young man stopped in his tracks and glanced around at where he was, there just down the road was a small white chapel. And out of the windows of that chapel, the young man could hear the preacher preaching, about the crucifixion. Now this young man had never really cared for church or ever really listened to what preachers had to say before. At least until that night, for some reason the words of that preacher reached out to him. That brutal word "CRUCIFIED" really struck his heart. He knew what brutality was and had seen enough of it in his young life to understand the horror of that word. A year before the young man had been serving in the army, he had gone to war and suffered serious wounds, that threatened his life. After months of recovery and long after the physical wounds healed the man was still plagued with the mental wounds that would never heal. He was discharged from the army and sent back to the states, where he just wandered the streets in the woeful stupor. He knew no one cared about him, he was unfit for war, for jobs, for friends or family. He knew only darkness and pain.

But now the preacher's words held his attention. He went into the small chapel and sat down. "A few months ago," the preacher said, "the trenches of the western front were filled with deadly battles and heavy artillery. In one particular field a few soldiers had been cut off from their main division. They were left out in no man's land as the fronts shifted. Through the heavy bombing and shelling, only one soldier remained alive. He was severely hurt. Back at the line, a buddy to that man could see his friend out there in the shell hole bleeding to death. He begged his commanding officer to let him risk going out there to see if he can drag his buddy back. Finally after much arguing and persuading, this brave man crawled, ran, dodged, his way across the no man's land trying to reach his friend. As he got near him, the enemy spotted him coming across and started firing. One bullet took him down, but he wasn't dead. The enemy seeing a chance to grab him jumped him and dragged this brave hero back to their side, beating him, kicking him.

They strung him up in the barbwire, hanging him there by that wire and stabbing him with their bayonets, until he died.

The preacher continued telling this story, "All the while the enemy was torturing this brave man who had gone out to save his friend, the hurt soldier, his friend laid there in the shell hole hearing the beating and screams of his friend as the stabbed him and hung him there to die. He saw it close at hand what his friend went through. He knew he had been spared because they thought he was already dead, but his friend suffered horribly in the effort to save him". The minister concluded the story saying "as long as he lives that wounded man will never forget how his buddy had died trying to save him. Crucified, They crucified him!, Have you forgotten that once a man bravely died for you? Was seized, beaten, stabbed and hung to die a slow agonizing death for your sakes? How have you returned that love?"

After the preacher was down and the service was ended young woeful man who was heading to the bars just a short time before, now stepped up to the preacher to talk with him. With tears in his eyes the young man said the he had never understood or believed in God. But tonight he had felt the hand of God. He told the preacher of what he was about to do, to drink and end it all down by the river. He went on to tell the preacher he was the young man in that shell hole in France and he had seen the horror of his friends death. He had seen only the pain and never saw the great gift that had been given to him to do something with in his life.

That is the power of the cross/ We live much of our lives figuratively going along with our heads down, our hands in our pockets, and our feet shuffling along, emotions down and buried. Not really noticing the power of the cross, that gives us life. The power of Christ's sacrifice for our sakes so that we may have the gift of life. We deserve suffering and death for our sins, for each of us do things we shouldn't and yet Someone else has paid the price for our wrongs. Jesus the Son of God, came into this world to die for you and me, simply because God loves us so much. What better message can you ever hear? God loves you. How can it get any better?

But you all have heard that before. John 3:16 is one of the most remembered parts of the Bible. Watch football or NASCAR race or some sporting event this afternoon and your bound to see at least one poster with 3:16 written on it. Even our Becoming study that continues next week, examined this passage and discussed God's love for creation. Some of you may come here each week wanting to hear this very passage over and over again. God loves you. God loves you. God loves you.

But the only problem is that we have heard that story of the crucifixion of Jesus so many times that we forget the true impact that it can make on our lives. It empowers us to react, it calls us to react. To be filled with new possibilities because we are no longer tied down by death.

Because of that love, because of that life that was crucified in place of me, I am free to do the work of God without fear, to share the love, to be what ever God wants me to be.

Without that crucifixion, we would remain fallen creatures, unworthy to stand before the throne of God. When we enter into that judgment day each one of us would be found lacking, loathed by God because of our rejection of grace, of love, and peace. Instead we would all be found a part of a world of the horrors of war, greed, hatred, envy, lust, gossip, racism, sexism, and all the other isms. . . , Those isms and sins are why there is a cross. Just as the cross reminds us of the glory of Christ, the resurrection and victory over death, it also reminds us of the hatred of this world, the suffering and the pain. In that pain and hurt, in that fallenness God sends his own Son to die for us because of that love. How have we responded?

There used to be a popular TV show a few years ago. It was a show of four friends, Perhaps you have seen it. In one episode the character named George was going to tell his girlfriend he loved her. His friend Jerry insisted he was making a mistake. But undeterred, George over dinner poured out his heart to his girlfriend and expressed his devotion and said those magical words, "I love you." His girlfriend looked at him a moment took a sip of her soup and said , "you have to try this soup, it is really good."

Aw that has to hurt, he expressed his everlasting love and in response he got "try to the soup its good". On this cross God says I love you, with my dying words, with my whole being, with all that I am I give myself for your sake, in place of you I will take the punishment that you deserve and suffer what you should be suffering. I love you that much, and how do we respond, "try the soup its real good."

The soldier at the beginning of my sermon finally when he heard the word "Crucified" realized what a gift he had been given by his friend. Up until then he had just seen the sorrow and the sadness. He had missed the opportunity to know the freedom and empowerment that was given him. The cross is a symbol of sadness and a grim reminder of our sinfulness, but it also is a symbol of love that empowers us to respond. May we hear the power of the cross this week and respond with our whole beings, free from death, trusting in the everlasting power, knowing the grace of God, may we do all that God has planned for us as his people here and now as a family of St. Mark. Amen.

May the peace and Grace of God be with you this day and throughout the week to come. AMEN.