

Sermon - Psalm 22:23-31 Mark 8:31- 9:1 March 8, 2009

## Worth the Price - The Bearable Cost of Christ's Cross

The psalmist sang of God's praise, even in the midst of his suffering. He declared his confidence in God's final and forever goodness and care. Those who praise God, their hearts live forever.

And I was surprised yesterday, almost startled, when I looked carefully at the Bulletin. I do write the Bulletin so I have a pretty good idea of what's there, but I just hadn't sensed or felt or thought enough about how the music flows through the service this morning – and how the music expresses powerfully well what I believe the Scriptures would have me preach this morning, and have you hear. It's our effort, Bruce and Marjorie and myself, to make this happen every Sunday, but today the music just fits very well.

The psalmist sang praise to God out of his time of difficulty and disappointment and struggle, and declared his trust. And that is, for me at least, the message of the music this morning, and my message.

First we sang - How Great Thou Art, celebrating the wonder and goodness of God's power and God's creation. And then – Beneath the Cross of Jesus – about God, and God's oneness with us and care for us in our suffering. Then the Bells rang Be Thou My Vision, my favorite hymn, and a plea for us to see life through the vision of life Jesus gave us. And we just sang, In the Cross of Christ I Glory - confessing to the wonder of God's redeeming love ... And the choir will sing - My Shepherd Will Supply My Need - Which is the sermon theme... Worth the Price – The Bearable Cost of Christ's Cross...

Are there crosses for us to bear in life – who would or could deny it ever – and in these times?

And then we will end our worship this morning singing Lift High the Cross, the Love of Christ Proclaim. We're singing and hearing played and sung, the message I think we need to hear. Jesus Christ bore the cross, he calls us to pick up our crosses and follow him, and the promise is that it can be done... it can be done.

The crosses Jesus Christ would have us bear, the crosses life sometimes nails us to, can be borne. And the cruel symbol of suffering can be what we say it should be – not a symbol of death, but a symbol of the victory of God's love for us in Christ, and at work in us by faith. Thank you Jesus, thank you God, for such a symbol of our faith.

Please pray with me.

Thank you God, Thank you Jesus, for such a gift, in the symbol of the cross, and for your word by which we know it's story. May my words and the thoughts of these your faithful and loving people, fix more firmly in us the wonder of your love for us. In Christ. Amen.

Beneath the Cross of Jesus... In the Cross of Christ I Glory... Lift High the Cross. Christians and the Cross. Can there ever be the first without the second? In fact, would there even be one without the other? And would there ever even have been any Christians at all without the cross?

How closely tied are the symbol and the faith of which it so much a part? In fact – what other symbol does come even close as the cross to being the symbol for the Christian faith? A shepherd's staff? Bread and Cup? But what meaning do they have without the cross. Or the fish: Just a secret symbol for those who know the story of Jesus.

But everywhere and almost anywhere you go - people seem to know – the cross = a Christian.

Yes - and how strange that that's the case. That a symbol of cruel punishment, of powerlessness, of defeat and death, should be the symbol of the world's largest religion... of our faith.

But it is our symbol - ours to live with – even if we aren't quite sure about what it all means. We do know what it is - in one form and shape or another - the cross is a means of punishment. We know, because the Bible tells us so, that Jesus, like other perceived rabble rousers, threats to Rome in those days, were convicted and cruelly whipped and beaten and nailed or roped to crosses and left for the public to watch die.

And we know, because the Bible tells us so, that Jesus made this symbol central to his own self-understanding – the son of man must undergo great suffering .

He said all this quite openly. If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves, and take up their cross and follow me.

Hard words to hear. Hard for us to hear, hard for the people Jesus was speaking to then to hear. Jesus had been drawing crowds because of his teaching and because of his healing. He had given a weary and suffering people hope. He'd told them stories of promise, parables about seeds growing and light shining. And he had fed them, and calmed the sea for them, healed the deaf and blind – and the crowds were drawn to him.

And then, Mark says, Jesus began to teach them. He began to teach them about what was really happening, and who he really was. And - they needed the best of teaching to get Jesus' point. And so do we.

We need to be taught very well to get the point of the cross – to get the point of the cross needing to be part of our lives, if we're going to be a part of Jesus' life.

Up until then – up until Jesus spoke the words about the cross – til then Jesus' stories and his healing powers, his acts of compassion, had won the hearts and minds of those who heard him. People liked what this man said and what he did, and the way he lived.

But now Jesus talks about the cost of his way, about living a new life, God-centered, not self-centered, about choosing to bet on the promise of eternal life rather than on hope for an easier earthly life; to choose to die now and live forever, rather than live now and simply just die. And Jesus needs to teach us about all of this. It doesn't make much sense. Die to live!

And be clear, that's what Jesus is talking about. It is about you and I getting ourselves crucified. About letting ourselves, our all too self-centered selves, be put to death, be buried, so that, yes, then, a new more perfect self – a god-centered Christ-focused self might be born. That's why we talk about Christians as born again people.

And we need some powerful teaching about all of this – this self-denial stuff. This is not popular self-help, live better life now in three easy steps stuff. This is, I suppose, even bad news about the Christian way of life. It is not a way to popularity.

In fact, how high a price it seems to pay for a way to live? To give up one's self. To call another your Lord and Savior. Maybe it is too much to bear, the cost of cross like living.

Or do we count the cost against the gain? Is that a way to weigh the pain? Is that a way, like anything else, to determine the worth of what it is we pay for? Cost versus gain.

And if we looked at the cross in this way - what we pay for what we get – then – then - could the cost of the cross be seen as worth the price - and so a bearable cost to pay?

What is the cost? The cross cost? And what's the gain?

Yes, our life is the cost. To give up ourselves. To choose to live no longer for myself first, but to live for God. But that's a loss that will come into our lives anyway - our last day will come no matter what we say. But Jesus is talking about choosing to lose our old selves to become the new persons we can become in Christ.

And the gain? The gain is the promise of a godly life that begins now and lasts forever, a life of promise and hope and joy that nothing and no one can take away from you. A knowledge that you are loved by the only one, who, in the end, really counts – the God who made you. O, and by the way, this way of life, this cross focused way of life, can also bring you daily joys and a lifetime of delight that nothing in this world ever can.

But – it is a way of life you and I have to choose. You are not born a Christian. You choose to be one, to be a little Christ. And it is no easy choice. All around us we are offered many many choices for how we will live our lives, how we will be able to be – smart, and sexy, and successful, and rich. It is every advertiser's job.

There is, of course, no full truth in this advertizing we see all the time. Jesus pointed that out. What does it profit a person to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? In things small and not small at all, all our choices have a price. Kwame has found that out, I suspect Cpuware

will too, and Tom Daschle , and Barry Bonds, and Maydoff day will come. And in little ways, our days too....

How sad, truly sad, to spend a lifetime trying to get all of life's toys, when, in the end, the years are gone, and you are gone, and the toys belong to someone else.

How sad for some in these truly hard times who have staked their lives on what they own – when so much of what we thought we owned is gone. Some of it never to return. How safe and sure the lives of those who knew and know – mind sure and soul certain, that no matter what – they are loved with a love that will never let them go. That no matter what crosses life gives them to bear, they do not carry their crosses alone,

And at the end of every cross walk is a victory sign. Well done good and faithful servant.

How good to know, for example, the deep down joy of doing a cross like loving thing - to nurse a mate through serious illness, to comfort a child over life's bumps and bruises to maturity, to help, as you did, a homeless family, to own a home. And even, to spend some of what you have, as you all did as a Church last year, to build for some one else's future home for faith, as you sought to do and did right here.

Yes – Christ calls us to take up our crosses - to step out into the world, to choose his way, his truth, and his love ... to wear a cross for Lent - not a piece of jewelry – but a clear sign of where we stand on the issues in life. To call ourselves to act and speak in harmony with the meaning of the cross - out of love for Christ.

Yes, to celebrate an historic election and rejoice in Obahma's win. Yes, to hear an end to torture by our county, and yet to speak out too to end unfettered abortion practices. Yes to defend the dignity of every single individual, but yes too to the sanctity of marriage. Yes to broader and fairer health care – but yes too to doctors and others who desire freedom of conscience.

Yes – Christ call us to take up our crosses – to be fools for Christ, faithful and self -giving in our love for each other, and willing to share whatever we have for the good of others.

O yes, and one thing more – to become forever children of the living God.

That's the prize we get for the price we pay of living the way of the cross. Christ's way – which calls us to love God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Deep down it's the not so hidden hope of all that we are doing here. Calling on ourselves to bear the cost of sharing what we have for the good of others.

Singing or playing in choirs... to brighten worship and lift the spirits of people struggling with so much stuff. Providing here a place for quiet celebration of the wonder of God's creation all around us, and God's spirit at work within us.

Teachers who seek to plant seeds of faith in young minds and hearts, so good choices will be made with all the decisions life demands.

Do gooders – who do the good that this church does - in Waterford, and Pontiac, in Detroit and Mexico, and Honduras and Africa - in the name and Spirit of Christ.

And those who cannot sing, or should not, like me, and those who cannot travel, but whose gifts can - can reach out through offerings, like the One Great Hour of Sharing, to touch with care in Christ's name the hurt, the pain, the crosses, others bear.

Bearable costs? To live like this? To comfort others as Christ did.? To be faithful in our promises to each other. To speak the truth in love, and love others as we love ourselves. Is the cost too high. Or is it worth the price, a bearable cost, to bear Christ's cross.... Amen.

David W. Robertson, Pastor