

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen

It was time for show and tell at school.

- The children were all excited.
- They wanted to show off what was most important to them.
- They wanted to impress their 3rd grade teacher.
- They wanted to impress their friends and classmates.

It was Johnny's turn.

- He got up before the class and held up the cross that otherwise was always hanging on the wall in his bedroom at home.
- After all, that was what was most important to Johnny. What meant the most to him.

The class was not so impressed. In fact they started to giggle and make fun of him.

- As 3rd graders they didn't think of it in this way, but they were looking at Johnny through the lens of worldly standards and influence and foolishness.

The teacher was taken back and didn't know exactly what to do.

- After all, you can't talk about God in a public school.

The other students quickly became bored.

- Joey's new baseball glove looked so much neater. And baseball season would soon be here.
- Jenny's little cheerleading outfit got their attention.
- After all, Jenny told them that one day she was going to be a cheerleader.
- And, the super bowl was only one week away.

The circumstances may be different, but each of us face the same temptations and influences, and perhaps even ridicule.....as Johnny did from the teacher and the 3rd grade class, don't we?

- You want people to respect and look up to you.
- You want people to think you are well educated and smart.
- And to the world, the cross looks so simple and foolish. So out of touch with a modern world.

Well, in our Epistle reading the apostle Paul is writing to the church at Corinth.

- And he faces the same challenges that little Johnny at show and tell and you in the world face.

- Perhaps the challenges and temptations are the same throughout the ages.

But to all of this, the Apostle Paul writes, “For I have decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”

- Those are good words for us to say and follow.
- They are on the cover of your bulletin for today and were read to you just a few minutes ago.

The Church at Corinth had fallen into many temptations.

- They thought in terms and ways of worldly wealth.
- They had improper sexual relations and bragged about it.
- They had improper practice of the Lord’s Supper.
- They had lawsuits and conflicts among parishioners.
- They had lost hope in the resurrection.
- And they did not understand spiritual gifts.

And to all this, Paul did not address them with eloquent speech, even though the Corinthians held eloquent speaker in high regard. They even idolized it.

- They not only admired the man who had a way with words.....they were ready to make him a god.

But instead, to all this Paul says, “I have decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”

- You see, for all of this Paul wanted to draw them into one thing, and one thing only, Jesus Christ and Him crucified.
- Paul had one thing in mind, for all eyes and ears and hearts to be focused on Jesus Christ and the cross.

Oh, Paul was capable of eloquence; he was an intelligent and well-educated man.

- But if that is what Paul used, it might have been because the apostle’s way with words caught their ears, not because the message of the cross won their hearts.

I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

- A way of summing that up, yes little Johnny, our eyes and our focus must be on the cross.

And what does the cross mean to you?

- We see it and display it often.
- It is properly so, very much on display throughout our church.
- Walk in this beautiful sanctuary and the first thing you will see above the altar is that big beautiful cross.

The church service begins and we have a processional with the crucifix leading the way.

- Throughout the service many times we have opportunities for the sign of the cross.
- Many of you hear today wear jewelry of the cross.
- As you leave the sanctuary look to the balcony and you will see the crucifix.
- The cross is the central truth of our faith that enlightens our human minds.

So the question I ask you today is, what does the cross mean to you? How important and central is it to your life?

- Do you often stop and reflect and take time to think on this.
- Do you sometimes take it for granted?

Does the cross relate to every season of the church year?

- We are in the season of Epiphany. We see this as a season of light and revealing.
- Very soon, in another 2 ½ weeks we will enter the Season of Lent. We see that as a season of the cross, and death, and darkness.

Do these 2 seasons of Epiphany and Lent go together?

- Yes, I would say that they do.
- And I bring this up to illustrate the power of the cross and how it is central to our faith and what we are all about.

One of the very beautiful hymns we have in the church is Lutheran Service Book page 578, “Thy Strong Word.” It helps us with all this.

- Hear now the words of verse four.
- From the cross **THY WISDOM SHINING BREAKETH FORTH** in conquering might.
- From the cross forever **BEAMETH** all Thy **BRIGHT REDEEMING LIGHT**.

Did you catch that?

- The cross is described as shining, breaking forth, beaming, and bright.
- The cross is bright.
- The cross enlightens our darkness!

- The cross is our great epiphany—that we will not be condemned.
- For Christ was crucified for YOU.

It is God who turns the world upside down.

- For the world, the cross represents foolishness and weakness. Even, sometimes, to be made fun of.
- For the Christian the cross represents the power and the wisdom of God.

I had mentioned that the Church at Corinth had many problems.

- And in the Book of First Corinthians Paul addressed each of them.
- Name a topic and it can be shown how the cross speaks to it.
- Let me address some of those topics now. And do so in more modern day terms than the church at Corinth.

The pastor of the congregation was concerned.

- It seemed that the parishioners acknowledged their sin but they did not seem to grasp the depth or consequences of their sin.

And for this we turn.....to the cross.

- The cross shows us the depth of our sin.
- Our sin is so great that it took the blood of Jesus to cleanse it.
- It took God humbling Himself to take on the form of man to die on the cross for our sins.

As you know, I do prison ministry.

- I have been with inmates that say there past is so bad, how can they ever be forgiven.
- They say, “Pastor I have ruined so many lives, my sins are too big.”
- And perhaps the words from you are different, but we each have sins of the past that we wonder or question if they can be forgiven.

And I invited the prisoner I was with and I invite you to look to the cross.

- Everyone of our sins of the past.....and the future.....were laid on the shoulders of our Savior.
- He paid the price in full for ALL our sins.

The confirmation student was thinking and reflecting deeply.

- He asked about God’s personality. What is He like and how do we know?

The pastor pointed to the cross.

- The cross reveals that God is gracious and merciful; for if God did not “spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also give us all that we need?”

Jenny came into the pastor’s office lamenting that she felt all alone.

- She needed help and she did not know where to find it.
- The pastor pointed her to the cross.
- If Jesus came down from heaven and died on the cross for all our sins, He certainly is always present and will help you with all your needs.
- At any time and any place. He is always with you. He has joined humanity as your brother never to be separated again.

Bob came into the pastor’s office concerned about being loved.

- The pastor pointed him to the cross and asked if there could be any greater love than for Jesus to humble Himself, come to earth, and die ON THE CROSS for your sins.
- A love that is deeper and stronger than we could ever imagine.
- Yes, Bob, you are dearly loved.

The high school student came into the pastor’s office about direction for her life.

- Many decisions to be made and how does God fit into this?
- The pastor pointed to the cross.
- Jesus has invited us to take up our CROSS and follow Him.
- And we know there will be hardship. If our Master suffered, how can we expect not to suffer also.
- As Jesus’ disciples we follow Him. We serve Him and keep Him at the center of all we do.
- Jesus and the cross becomes the center point for our direction and everything in life.

The elderly lady just moved into a senior living facility.

- The pastor came to visit her.
- The lady, reflecting on where she now was lamented to the pastor on her value and worth in life.
- The pastor pointed to the cross. He reminded her that she has so much value to God that He sent His Son to the cross to die for her.
- He reminded her that in the cross she can see that she is of very great value.

James was near death.

- The pastor was with him by his bedside.
- James expressed to the pastor that he was not sure if he was going to heaven.
- Pastor, I haven't led the perfect life. I have some doubts.

The pastor pointed James to the cross.

- He reminded him that it is not in what we have done but in what Christ has done that we are saved.
- And if we are forgiven in Christ, then we have been reconciled to the Father.
- And if we have been reconciled to the Father, then we have peace with Him.
- And if we have peace with Him, we have enmity with the devil and the devil can no longer have any claim on us.

One final scenario.

- Megan came into the office and she said, "Pastor I know we are to love our neighbors, but I sure have trouble doing that."
- How am I suppose to love someone who is my enemy?

And the pastor pointed to the cross.

- The pastor reminded Megan that Jesus died for the sins of all people.
- And that each person you see, especially your enemies, remind yourself that Jesus died on the cross for their sins.
- And that love that Jesus showed in doing that is a love that sits on us and is to reflect from us to others.
- It is in Christ and the cross that you can love your enemies.

Literally the cross speaks to every aspect of our life.

- And the cross is the epiphany to these things.

I mentioned that sometimes the cross can seem as evil, death, and darkness.

- But on the cross all these things were defeated.

Recall that on the cross from noon to 3:00 there was total darkness.

- This isn't just like an overcast day.
- This is total darkness.
- A darkness so thick that you could feel and cut it.
- But what happened?

- Jesus said, “It is finished” and the light shown.
- The light from the cross was stronger and deeper than evil, the world, and the devil.

The words of Jesus in John chapter 12 verses 46 sums this up well.

- It is our chosen Scripture reading hanging on the sign outside the church office for this week.
- Jesus had just spoken of how the Son of Man must be lifted up on the cross and He says.....
- “I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.”

It is good and proper that the cross be prominent and before us.

- The 3rd grader, little Johnny got it right at show and tell.
- May we always look to and cherish the cross as a reminder of what Christ has done for us.
- And may the cross light the way and lead us in how we are to live and respond to Him.

As we see and display the cross; as we receive and make the sign of the cross, may we be aware of all this and walk with Jesus.

- The cross does speak to every aspect of our lives.

“For I have decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”

- May these words of profound and deep wisdom, more than man can fully comprehend, be our words also.
- Amen.

(Please stand) And now, may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Having heard the Word of God we now prepare our hearts and minds to confess together the words of the Nicene Creed as found on page 206 in your hymnal.