

Our celebration of events around Easter must always begin with the sacrificial purpose of Christ's coming to earth. He did not come to earth to start a political or military revolution, or take up the sword to bring an immediate judgment of all evil in our day, or to make a name for Himself as a human leader. He came to earth to glorify His Father and to serve His Father's will by dying for the sins of His people, thereby purchasing the church for Himself with the price of His blood. It is for this sacrificial and saving work that Christ was "ordained as the Lamb from the foundation of the world" (1 Peter 1:20). No wonder the hymns of the church focus on the Cross as the great glory of God revealed in the suffering of His Son, Jesus Christ! May we glory in that Cross in this week's readings.

Monday: Read 1 Corinthians 11:26 & Romans 5:6-10

A Magnified Cross

We are to remember Christ and Him crucified at all times and in all seasons of the Christian life! Why such enthusiasm for a Cross, which the world counts to be shameful? Paul declares in his institution of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:26) that the church is to be known as a body which "proclaims the death of Jesus Christ until He comes." It is no surprise to see how hymnody reflects this priority of focusing on the Cross:

- It is "Beneath the Cross of Jesus, we fain would take our stand"! (Hymn # 251 in our Red Trinity Hymnal).
- It is during the moments we spend before the Cross that we, "find the dawn of heaven, while upon the Cross we gaze" (Hymn # 258, verse 3).
- It is Christ's own emphasis on the Cross which explains our focus on it. By being "lifted up" on the Cross, Christ promised to draw men and women from all tribes and nations (John 12:32) to salvation.

Meditate and Pray: No wonder Paul magnifies the death of Jesus. In Romans 5:6-10, it is through the bloody death of Jesus that we are saved from the "wrath of God" (v.9) and from eternal death. Paul cannot contain himself when he says, "If by his death we were reconciled, how much more shall we be saved through His life" (v. 10)! Lord, teach us to hope, boast, and rest in the cross of our Savior, who loved us and gave Himself for us (Gal. 2:20).

Tuesday: Read 1 Corinthians 2:1-3

The Low Path

We are to resolve with the Apostle Paul to know nothing but Christ and Him crucified, even though such a Cross-centered focus does not resonate with a world obsessed by the pursuits of this life. In this world, unbelievers pursue the lust of the flesh, the pleasures which earthly eyes can behold now, and the pride of living life to the fullest in the present. As Jesus says (Matt 6:32): "The pagans run after these things"!

Meditate and Pray: Lord, please give us, in contrast to the world, grace to resolve to pursue the path of the Cross. As Horatius Bonar puts it in *Trinity Hymnal* # 584: "It is the way the Master went, should not the servant tread it still?"

Wednesday: Read John 12:23-33**Our Sins Nailed Thee**

Some of the most instructive references to the Cross occur in the Gospel accounts of what drove Jesus forward in His mission on earth. It is in the *missionary motives* of our Savior's saving work that we see the Cross as central.

- Jesus states His goal as He comes to Jerusalem and declares that the hour has come for Him to be glorified (John 12:23-24). Falling into the ground to die (on the Cross) as the beginning of a new harvest of salvation.
- Jesus speaks explicitly about the Cross in verses 32-33. To die was Jesus' goal. Jesus did not come to Jerusalem to become king; He already was The King and didn't need to come down to earth to become one. He came to earth to be planted in the ground by death on the Cross. This explains why every time the crowds spoke about Jesus as the royal Christ, (John 12:34) or tried in their zeal to make Him king (John 6:15), He "hid Himself from them" (John 12:36). But when it came time to present Himself for death, He openly met His captors (John 18:4-8). He was determined to lay down His life voluntarily, though "no one could take it from Him" (John 10:18), and all this was for the sake of His love for us.

Meditate and Pray: Do we love Jesus for the same reason His Father's heart was so full of affection for Him? "The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life." (John 10:17) Do we make enough of the Cross as the center of our joy? May we enter more and more into the Cross-appreciating spirit of *Trinity Hymnal #255*:

*"O Jesus, we adore thee, upon the cross, our King!
We bow our hearts before thee, thy gracious name we sing.
That name hath brought salvation, that name in life our stay,
our peace, our consolation, when life shall fade away."*

*"Yet doth the world disdain thee, still passing by the cross;
Lord, may our hearts retain thee; all else we count but loss.
Ah, Lord, our sins arraigned thee, and nailed thee to the tree:
our pride, our Lord, disdained thee; yet deign our hope to be."*

Thursday: Read John 12:25-33**Delivered from Death**

Jesus lived with an unselfish disregard for His own comfort, postponing present joy in this world for the future joy of purchasing sinners by His blood. In the world's estimate, as John 12:25 says, He truly "hated" His life, being willing to suffer acutely now for the sake of eternal life later. We see this suffering begin even before the cross (John 12:27) Jesus says: "Now my heart is troubled..." This word, "troubled," describes agitation, disquiet or perplexity and three times describes Jesus' anguish in the face of death: John 11:33, 12:27 and 13:21. This word "always expresses the emotions which conflict with death stirred in Him" (B.B Warfield, *The Emotional Life of our Lord*)

Meditate and Pray: Thank Jesus that He faced death, the curse due us for sin, with a painful, serious commitment. He viewed it as an enemy to be overcome. Even more, He not only was deeply troubled at His own upcoming death on the cross; He was also compassionately concerned with what death meant for others. In John 11:33-35, Jesus is disturbed even to tears at the grief which Lazarus' death caused. Jesus was determined to die to destroy the hold which the fear of death has over us. Now we need not fear dying: it is safe for us because Jesus took so much trouble to die in our place! See also Hebrews 2:14-15.

Fri/Sat/Sun: Read Romans 5:6-10 & John 20:19-27**Reckoning Up the Difference**

We began this week by observing how the church in its hymnody and mission follows the example of Paul in magnifying the death of Jesus, as for example, in Romans 5:6-10, where the Apostle argues that it is through the blood death of Jesus that we are saved from the wrath of God (v.9). As an observation exercise, make a list of the four or 5 characteristics of those for whom Christ died, before and after, from Romans 5: 5-10. (You can compare your list with mine on the back of this page.) Paul cannot contain himself as he declares, “If by his death we were reconciled, how much more shall we be saved through His life” (v. 10)! Thus it is always the peace and forgiveness procured by Christ’s blood sacrifice which makes the resurrection such a joyful reality.

In terms of Christ’s Easter appearances, ask yourself why it is that every time Christ appears in His resurrection body, the greeting “Peace” is the first word out of his mouth. The answer, as J.I. Packer points out, is:

When Jesus came to His disciples in the upper room at evening on His resurrection day, He said, ‘Peace be unto you’; ‘and when He had so said, He showed them His hands and His side; (John 20:19f.). Why did He do that? Not just to establish His identity, but to remind them of the propitiatory death on the cross whereby He had made peace with His Father for them. Having suffered in their place, as their substitute, to make peace for them, He now came in His risen power to bring that peace to them. ‘Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.’ It is here, in the recognition that, whereas we are by nature at odds with God, and God with us, Jesus has ‘made peace through the blood of His cross’ (Colossians 1:20). In such true knowledge (of the results of the Cross) the peace of God begins.
J.I.Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 177.

Meditate and Pray: Do you know this peace? Do your loved ones? For those being tossed and troubled in this peace-less world, let us ask the Lord Jesus through His gospel to come to such, “preaching peace to those far and near” (Eph. 2:17). He still speaks, and, hearing His voice, “new life the dead receive.”

Notes on Romans 5: 6-10:

Before: wrath, enemy, weak, sinner, ungodly

After: saved, substituted for, justified, no wrath, reconciled, peace, gladness