



At Home Worship for Faith and Hope

First Sunday in Lent

February 21, 2021

* Call to Worship

Ashes have been smeared and sins have been confessed...

We follow our faithful Lord.

These times, they are troubling. This journey, it is hard...

We follow our faithful Lord.

It is God who sustains, not the temptations of this world...

We follow our faithful Lord.

In the Lord is our trust, our protection from harm...

We follow our faithful Lord.

Come, let us worship the One whom we serve...

We follow our faithful Lord.

*Song of Praise

"How Great Thou Art"

UMH 77

Either Sing/Read the Song Below or Listen to a Worship Song

Opening Prayer

We have gathered here, loving God, to mark the season of Lent, to begin that journey to the cross. We have gathered here to repent of our sins. Guide us throughout these forty days as we journey deeper into Your embrace, and as we journey to the cross, let us put to death those things that separate us from each other and from you. May we know Your Presence is always with us, the power of Your transformative love is within us, and may we know Your grace surrounds us and is beyond us. In the name of Jesus, our companion on this journey of faith, we pray. Amen.

NO Children's Moments This Week

Share How You Can Present Your Offering to God

Make your offering personal...through a donation or an act of service...bring to God an offering of gratitude with grit! Lift up with thanksgiving to God for the ways He has helped you through these difficult days.

Sing the Doxology Together

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; praise him, all creatures here below; praise him above, ye heavenly host; praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayers of Confession and Gratitude for Lent

—John van de Laar

*It seems impossible that anyone would give what you did
to save men and women like us;*

But, you gave yourself freely for our sakes.

*It seems unimaginable that anyone could love the way you did,
including outcasts, rebels, scorners and scoffers, and even your persecutors,
and refusing to strike back;*

But, you loved so much that you laid down your life for our sakes.

*It seems inconceivable that anyone would offer the forgiveness that you did
even as nails pierced your flesh,
and the cross was stained with your blood;*

***But, you did not hold our sin against us,
and took on yourself the suffering that should have been ours.***

*Forgive us that we have allowed greed and violence,
pride and deceit, bitterness and coldness,
to have a place in our hearts;*

And fill us again with Your immeasurable grace,

***Your inexhaustible love, and Your unconquerable life,
that we may be changed,
and may express our love and devotion
through lives of worship.
Amen.***

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

God's Word

Matthew 27:39-44 (NLT)

The Word of God for the people of God...Thanks be to God!

Introduction to New Lenten Series **"Seven Words TO the Cross"**

Message

"The Word of Scorn"

Pastor Clark

...see below or go to website to listen online

* Hymn of Faith

"The Old Rugged Cross"

UMH 504

Blessing

*Friends,
as we go from here,
let us rid ourselves of every weight that slows us down,
especially the sin that so easily impedes our progress.
Let us run the race that God has set before us,
keeping our eyes on Jesus Christ,
on whom our faith depends, from start to finish.
And as we run,
know that the grace of Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the presence of the Holy Spirit,
is always with you.*



Old Rugged Cross

1 On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross,
the emblem of suffering and shame;
and I love that old cross where the dearest and best
for a world of lost sinners was slain.

Refrain:

So I'll cherish the old rugged cross,
till my trophies at last I lay down;
I will cling to the old rugged cross,
and exchange it some day for a crown.

2 O that old rugged cross, so despised by the world,
has a wondrous attraction for me;
for the dear Lamb of God left his glory above
to bear it to dark Calvary. [Refrain]

3 In that old rugged cross, stained with blood so divine,
a wondrous beauty I see,
for 'twas on that old cross Jesus suffered and died,
to pardon and sanctify me. [Refrain]

4 To that old rugged cross I will ever be true,
its shame and reproach gladly bear;
then he'll call me some day to my home far away,
where his glory forever I'll share. [Refrain]

The Word of Scorn in the *Seven Words TO the Cross Series*

Matthew 27:39-44 (NLT)

³⁹ *The people passing by shouted abuse, shaking their heads in mockery.* ⁴⁰ *“Look at you now!” they yelled at him. “You said you were going to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days. Well then, if you are the Son of God, save yourself and come down from the cross!”* ⁴¹ *The leading priests, the teachers of religious law, and the elders also mocked Jesus.* ⁴² **“He saved others,” they scoffed, “but he can’t save himself!** *So he is the King of Israel, is he? Let him come down from the cross right now, and we will believe in him!* ⁴³ *He trusted God, so let God rescue him now if he wants him! For he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”* ⁴⁴ *Even the revolutionaries who were crucified with him ridiculed him in the same way.*

Introduction

We begin our Lenten journey in an unlikely place...by visiting the Cross when the passersby mock and scorn Jesus. The word scorn is an unpleasant word; hardly one to begin an inspirational Lenten series. But let me remind you, as J. Ellsworth Kalas did in his Lenten study, *“the goal of Lent is not to please or entertain our hearts, but to cause us to repent, so that in time our hearts will be ready for the ecstatic wonder of Easter.”*

When Matthew tells us that the people passing by the Cross, *“shook their heads in mockery”* in that culture, it was a dramatic way of showing contempt...it was a gesture of shaming someone.

Imagine the setting: The Romans wanted crucifixions to occur in public in highly visible places as a deterrent to crime. Golgotha was likely on a busy thoroughfare where people walked in daily life. Imagine shopping at Easton and happening upon a crucifixion in the center square where everyone passes. That gives you a picture of how public this setting was.

Next, let’s take a look at the crowd of people who passed by the Cross and scorned Jesus. Before the passersby, consider first that one of the thieves next to Jesus mocked Jesus on the Cross. But more troubling was that the full array of religious leaders heaped their scorn upon Jesus. Political leaders and Roman centurions scoffed at Jesus. General people going about their business vent their frustration upon Jesus. They had wanted a savior who could deliver them from Roman rule; now Jesus hung on a Cross. Quite a cross-section of humanity.

All these people had their own reasons to ridicule and mock Jesus. But we must also see ourselves in the original characters. While it might not be comfortable to take such an introspective look inside, we are capable of being scorners, scoffers, and mockers. There are many reasons why, but I think at the core of it is that we resent goodness and excellence. So, we mock those who are expressions of those very qualities. Something out of sync within us causes us to find some measure of delight in the fall of the mighty.

For example, why do bullies bully? Again, many motives are possible, but at least one is that bullies resent something the person they bully possess.

Allow the search light of the Holy Spirit to examine your heart this Lenten season. Are there any hidden pockets of scorn in your heart toward someone else? While we may have domesticated our scorn into more socially acceptable expressions, it is scorn nonetheless. Do you find any delight when someone of goodness or excellence slips a notch or even stumbles? When the mighty fall?

#1 He saved others

The irony of it all; the crowd was right. Jesus saves others! Those who mocked Jesus paid him an unconscious tribute. They were venting their poisonous perspectives, but didn't even grasp that they were actually declaring the truth about Jesus' identity and mission.

We might recall a series of stories that come front and center to our minds from the gospels:

- A blind beggar who receives his sight
- Ten lepers who were cleansed
- A little girl raised from the dead
- A poor demon-possessed creature who was restored to sanity and wholeness
- A woman about to be stoned to death who was rescued and then forgiven
- A multitude who were fed one day on a hillside

Why ridicule Someone like this? Why scoff at One who saved others? Why scorn Jesus whose love rescued so many? They resent His goodness or His authority or they felt threatened by the radical difference between their kingdoms and God's Kingdom or they were disappointed Jesus didn't fulfill their view of Messiah who would deliver them from the Romans oppression or they were so blinded by their pride and power they could see no relevance in a Messiah who chose a path of humility. Why scorn Jesus? They were blinded by the Evil One who is the lord of scorn.

Again, look inside. Don't we resent Jesus' goodness and authority at times...doesn't it make us uncomfortable at times? Are we not threatened by the radical values of God's Kingdom? Aren't we, too, disappointed at times when Jesus doesn't meet our expectations? Are we at times blinded by our own pride that we don't see how desperately we need Jesus? This Lent, may we experience the liberating mercy of Jesus cleanse us deep within.

#2 But He couldn't save Himself

Donald Carson mentions another irony: ***the One who is mocked as king, who cannot save Himself, is the King!*** The rest of verse 42 shows this clearly: *"So, he is the King of Israel, is he? Let him come down from the cross right now, and we will believe in him!"*

But Matthew knows and his readers know ***Jesus is the King***. The Israelites are part of a tradition that goes back to David. The prophecies had accumulated across the Old Testament promising a Davidic king who would be in David's line but would be called Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Seven centuries before Christ, Isaiah was speaking in those terms. Matthew begins his book with the origins of Jesus Christ, the son of Abraham, the son of David. The point is that Jesus stands in the royal line of the Davidic king. When Jesus begins to preach, he announces, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." As he tells parables about kings, it's obvious he is referring to himself.

The scorners and scoffers demanded that Jesus to demonstrate God's power by coming down from the Cross. They didn't realize, however, it was God's power that kept Him on the Cross! J. Ellsworth Kalas says with great insight: *"Jesus chose not to escape the Cross, but to bear the Cross. Jesus proved He was God's Son by His willingness to stay on the Cross."*

Again, another irony: ***the One who is utterly powerless is transcendentally powerful.*** Jesus chose not to escape. Jesus also chose not to use His power to obliterate His human enemies. In His transcendent power Jesus could have rained down judgment upon all who mocked and scorned Him. He chose to be forbearing in love.

So, Jesus was fulfilling His calling and fulfilling prophecy to take up this Cross. He came to make a Cross His throne...to utilize His power to set us free at the expense of His own life. Listen to *Isaiah 53:3, 5*:

*He was despised and rejected—
a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief.
We turned our backs on him and looked the other way.
He was despised, and we did not care...
But he was pierced for our rebellion,
crushed for our sins.
He was beaten so we could be whole.
He was whipped so we could be healed.*

So here is the heart of it all. ***"Jesus saves you because He chose not to save Himself."*** That is the essence of God's sacrificial love!

Christian minister John Dickson once spoke on the theme of the wounds of God on a university campus in Sydney, Australia. During the question time, a Muslim man rose to explain "how preposterous was the claim that the Creator of the universe should be subjected to the forces of his own creation—that he would have to eat, sleep, and go to the toilet, let alone die on a cross." Dickson said his remarks were intelligent, clear, and civil. The man went on to argue that it was illogical that God, the "cause of all causes" could have pain inflicted on him by any lesser beings. Dickson thought for a minute but he couldn't come up with a knockdown argument or a witty comeback. So finally, he simply thanked the man for making the uniqueness of the Christian claim so clear. Then Dickson concluded, *"What the Muslim denounces as blasphemy the Christian holds precious: **God has wounds.**"*

Jesus is the only God with scars! As a result, the Cross is the one place people who have scars can turn. All of earth's victims have a place to turn to, all can find their refuge in Him.

- If you've ever been a **victim of prejudice**, then cry out to the Man on the center Cross: **"Bear my scorn with me, O Christ!"**
- If you've ever been loved and then **rejected**, call out to the One who chose to hang there just for you: **"Bear my rejection with me, O Christ!"**
- If you've ever been **shut out** of circle of friendship, come to the One on the Cross: **"Bear my pain with me, O Christ!"**
- If you've ever felt the **cut of contempt or the sting of scorn**, then humbly come to the Cross. **Call out to the One who bears your scorn with you.**
- If you've ever been **ridiculed for your faith** in Jesus Christ, then rest assured you are not alone. **Rejoice you are sharing the sufferings of Christ who chose to stay on the Cross for your sake.**

In her book ***The God Who Hung on the Cross***, journalist Ellen Vaughn retells a gripping story of how the Gospel came to a small village in Cambodia. In September 1999 Pastor Tuy Seng (not his real name) traveled to Kampong Thom Province in northern Cambodia. Throughout that isolated area, most villagers had cast their lot with Buddhism or spiritism. Christianity was virtually unheard of.

But much to Seng's surprise, when he arrived in one small, rural village the people warmly embraced him and his message about Jesus. When he asked the villagers about their openness to the gospel, an old woman shuffled forward, bowed, and grasped Seng's hands as she said, "We have been waiting for you for twenty years." And then she told him the story of the mysterious God who had hung on the cross.

In the 1970s the Khmer Rouge, the brutal, Communist-led regime, took over Cambodia, destroying everything in its path. When the soldiers finally descended on this rural, northern village in 1979, they immediately rounded up the villagers and forced them to start digging their own graves. After the villagers had finished digging, they prepared themselves to die. Some screamed to Buddha, others screamed to demon spirits or to their ancestors.

One of the women started to cry for help based on a childhood memory—a story her mother told her about a God who had hung on a cross. The woman prayed to that unknown God on a cross. Surely, if this God had known suffering, he would have compassion on their plight.

Suddenly, her solitary cry became one great wail as the entire village started praying to the God who had suffered and hung on a cross. As they continued facing their own graves, the wailing slowly turned to a quiet crying. There was an eerie silence in the muggy jungle air. Slowly, as they dared to turn around and face their captors, they discovered that the soldiers were gone.

As the old woman finished telling this story, she told Pastor Seng that ever since that humid day from 20 years ago the villagers had been waiting, waiting for someone to come and share the rest of the story about the God who had hung on a cross.

Conclusion

“Jesus saves you because He chose not to save Himself.”

Jesus was ridiculed: *“He trusted God, so let God rescue him now if he wants him!”* Again, the irony is profound. They were indeed right; Jesus did trust God...trusted God with all the ridicule and rejection and all the scoffing and scorn. Left it in God’s hands. In complete abandon, Jesus entrusted the worst people could spew upon Him to God, so He could faithfully fulfill His sacrificial calling.

We too are called to that kind of trust. That kind of abandon. One day we too may endure the scorn of a raging crowd for our faith in Jesus. Just at that moment we must remember Jesus and how Jesus chose to endure that scorn for our sakes.

A stunning picture of this comes from Mark Twain's story, ***A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court***. Mark Twain tells the adventures of a very ordinary man from the 19th century transported back to the medieval world of King Arthur. At one point he convinces King Arthur to dress like a peasant and take a journey through his kingdom. The results are generally laughable as the king, completely oblivious to life in the trenches, tries to carry on with all the pomp of the court while all the others around him simply think he is crazy.

But there is a wonderful paragraph describing a moment when this king in disguise reveals the true royalty of his heart. He and his companion come upon a beggar's home and find it silent as death because smallpox is claiming the beggar's daughter. The king disappears up a ladder looking for the girl.

"There was a slight noise from the direction of the dim corner where the ladder was. It was the king descending. He was bearing something in one arm, and assisting himself with the other. He came forward into the light; upon his breast lay a slender girl of fifteen. She was but half conscious; she was dying of smallpox.

"Here was heroism at its last and loftiest possibility, its utmost summit; this was challenging death in the open field unarmed, with all the odds against the challenger, nor reward set upon the contest, and no admiring world in silks and cloth-of-gold to gaze and applaud; and yet the king's bearing was as serenely brave as it had always been in those cheaper contests where knight meets knight in equal fight and clothed in protecting steel. He was great now; sublimely great.

The rude statues of his ancestors in his palace should have an addition—I would see to that; and it would not be a mailed king killing a giant or a dragon, like the rest. ***It would be a king in commoner's garb bearing death in his arms.***"

In Jesus, we have a King, clothed with the common garb of human flesh, who took death in His arms, so He could save us by choosing not to save Himself.

Hebrews 12:1-2 (NLT)

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. ² We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. **Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne.** ³ Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won't become weary and give up. ⁴ After all, you have not yet given your lives in your struggle against sin.*