

June 27, 2010
Pentecost 5
Bible Camp Sunday

“Cherish the Cross”

LUKE 9:18-24

Luke 9:18 *Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say I am?” 19 They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.” 20 “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “The Christ of God.” 21 Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone. 22 And he said, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.” 23 Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. 24 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.*

This past week we were privileged to have another Bible camp here at Star of Bethlehem Lutheran Church. The theme for this past week was “The Circle J Ranch.” Here is the brand for the “Circle J Ranch.” Notice the J for Jesus, the T for the cross and the circle that reminds us that through Jesus life will go on forever and ever.

We talked about special events at the dude ranch such as trail rides, stories around the bonfire, and the good food at the chuck wagon. These events at the dude ranch were used to introduce the lessons that helped us see that through Jesus and his cross we have life that goes on forever and ever. The children heard lessons about Jesus riding into Jerusalem to save us, not on a nice horse but a lowly donkey. They heard about Jesus feeding five thousand people not with beans and biscuits and steak from a chuck wagon, but with only five barley loaves and two small fish. They learned about Jesus as their Shepherd and were taught the simple prayer that we can pray in difficult times, “The Lord is MY Shepherd.”

Jesus wants all people, children and adults, to come to know about his death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead so they can have life with him that begins now and lasts forever. Let’s turn our attention to the words just read to you to see this intense desire that Jesus has for all people to cherish the cross as the way to have life that lasts forever.

Cherish the cross that Jesus endured for you

People didn’t always follow after Jesus because they wanted to hear about his suffering and death on the cross. At times the crowds were so large that Jesus had to make a special time to be alone with his heavenly Father in prayer. We are told, “Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” Jesus was alone with his disciples, praying in private. When you see Jesus spending time alone with his heavenly Father in prayer, what comes to you mind? Do you

not think of how important it is for you and me to have more time alone with our heavenly Father in prayer? We start jobs without prayer. We face important responsibilities in our lives without going to the Lord in prayer. Jesus once told his disciples, "Watch and pray for the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

How hard it must have been for Jesus to see large crowds of people coming to him for the wrong reasons. That is why he asked his beloved disciples, "Who do the crowds say I am?" He wanted them to see what he saw, people coming to him like sheep without a shepherd. The disciples heard the people talking about Jesus. Some said he was John the Baptist who came back to life again after being beheaded by King Herod. Others were saying he was the great prophet Elijah come back down to this earth after going into heaven in a fiery chariot. Still others were saying Jesus was a great prophet. What were missing from the crowd were those who believed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world.

What do the crowds of people believe about Jesus today? Many still look to Jesus as a great religious leader, someone who can help them fine tune their life to help them be a better person and earn their own way into heaven. Just as children go to basketball camps and soccer camps to fine tune their skills, they believe that you can go to Jesus and he will help you live a better life so you can have a nicer place in heaven. A movie star was once asked why she was generous with her money. She smiled and said, "You know, the more you pay now, the better place you will have in the future."

This past week we tried to show the children our need for Jesus to save us from our sin by holding up a balloon and then pricking it with a pin. If we could be perfect all our lives and commit only one small sin like the pin prick in a balloon, we would break God's law. Everything we do would be unacceptable to him. The book of James says if we offend in one part of the law we are guilty of all. Then we talked about trying to repair the broken balloon with masking tape and duct tape. It is even more foolish and impossible to repair our lives and make ourselves acceptable to God. That is why we need Jesus to save us.

Jesus asked his disciples what they believed about him. "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ of God." Peter believed that Jesus was the Christ, the one our heavenly Father chose to save us. In Isaiah we are told that the Lord God our heavenly Father saw that no one could save themselves. "He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm worked salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained." Our heavenly Father sent his own arm, his only begotten Son to this world to save us. Jesus is the Christ. That means he is the one the Father has chosen to get the job done and do it right.

If you want your car fixed, you don't go to someone who paints houses. If you need your teeth repaired, you don't go to a mechanic. If you want food to eat, you don't go to the hardware store. If you want to be saved and live forever, then you need to go to the place our Father has chosen to save us, Jesus his Son. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

So how did Jesus get the job done of saving us?

How did Jesus save us? It was through a cross. He told his disciples, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life again." Jesus wants all people to cherish what he did on the cross to save them. He wants us to cherish that he rose again on the third day just as he said he would.

To illustrate how Jesus suffered for our sins, we used the example of a sponge. Just as this sponge can absorb water, Jesus absorbed and took on him the sin of the whole world. Think of the pain and suffering we can go through because of one thing we do wrong, one unkind word that we speak, or one thing we fail to do for someone. Jesus took the sin of the world upon himself. If you could invent a sponge that could absorb all the oil that was spilled in the Gulf, what an amazing blessing such a sponge would be. Jesus became sin for us. The prophet Isaiah says, "The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all...He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities."

We love stories of people being rescued and saved. A few years ago in the state of Washington, a four year old boy wandered off in to the thick woods near his house and got lost. He wasn't even wearing a jacket to keep him warm. It was cold and wet, and yet the boy was able to survive several days without dying. The reason he lived was his large yellow lab dog went with him. The rescuers assumed the dog had kept him warm at night. As much as we like stories such as this, they are always secondary to the greatest act of love the world has ever known of God sending his Son to die for us on a cross so we could have life that goes on forever and ever.

Cherish the cross that you endure for Jesus

Because Jesus has rescued you, and you are his sheep, and he is your Shepherd, don't think for a moment that your life on this earth as a Christian will be a piece of cake. Don't think for a moment that you won't have challenges and difficulties in life.

Jesus tells us that because he went to the cross for us to save us, we will have to bear crosses in this life for him. "Then he said to them all: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.'" Jesus did not say that we should take up our cross once in a while and follow him. He said that we are to take up our cross daily and follow him. The closer you follow Jesus, the tougher your life on this earth will be.

What is meant by carrying our cross for Jesus? It does not mean that we make a cross out of timbers and every morning before we go to work or school we drag the cross around our neighborhood. It does not mean that we wear a cross around our neck. Jesus explains what this means when he says that we are to deny ourselves and lose our lives for him. That means we give up the old sinful part of our lives with which we were born into this world. It means saying "No!" to any thought that we can add something to what Jesus has done to save us. It means saying, "No" not just a soft little "No!" but a very loud "No!" to sin that wants to come back into my life and take over some part of my life. That is not easy because we are all very selfish by nature and want to do things our way instead of God's way.

Is it hard to be a Christian and live for Jesus who gave his life for you on the cross? Listen to what the Apostle Paul said in Romans 7, "For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do, no, the evil I do not want to do- this I keep on doing." Jesus wants us to bear the cross for him and endure the pain that comes from saying no to sinful thoughts and actions. As hard as it is to live for Jesus and follow him, it is such a joy and privilege as Paul wrote in Philippians "For me to live is Christ." The privilege of bearing the cross for Jesus can be summed up in the little word "JOY"- Jesus first, others second, yourself last." As simple as this sounds it is so hard and difficult yet such a privilege and honor. Cherish the cross that Jesus endured for you. It is the only way to live forever with the Lord. Cherish the cross Jesus allows you to endure. It is such a blessing to live our lives for him. We love him because he first loved us. Amen.