

Palm Sunday 4/13/25

*[JESUS] HUMBLING HIMSELF BY BECOMING OBEDIENT TO THE
POINT OF DEATH, EVEN DEATH ON A CROSS*

Does God love me? Have you ever asked yourself that question? Have you ever wondered if God loves you? I think it's fair to say, that at one time or another, we have all wondered if God loves me. And so, we want a sign, we demand a sign from God to assure us that He loves us and is with us. The Sunday of the Passion gives us that sign – the cross. Today, we look at the sign of the cross and are comforted that God loves us, cares for us, and is with us.

Tuesday, your taxes are due. Wednesday night, we talked about forgiveness. Honestly, that might be a most unwelcome topic for you, because you have memories, painful memories, still fresh in your mind. Just when we starting looking forward to spring and summer, prairie fires are raging along the North Dakota – South Dakota border. And daily in our rural outback, we hear of fentanyl and methamphetamine, and more fentanyl and meth.

Memories of flood waters filling your home may not be all that distant in your recollections. You're spending your golden years with your new best friend, your doctor. Your children have turned from the delight of your heart to breaking your heart. Your spouse once said "I do," but now doesn't.

On this side of heaven, we live in the darkness of the valley of the shadow of death. We, like sheep, have gone astray from the flock and protection of our Good Shepherd. The wolves howl and hound us. That prowling lion Satan tries to devour us. It is lonely. And, it is frightening.

In the weakness of our flesh, with danger and sorrow at every hand, we ask: "Where are you, God?" We doubt. We doubt that God is with us. We doubt that He loves us. We doubt that He cares for us.

Today, we see the visible sign of God's love. The very Son of God rides into God's city, riding on a beast of burden, carrying the burden of the sin of all the world. And, as a lamb to the slaughter, so the Lamb of God, bearing all the world's sin, is lead to the slaughter of the cross.

Sign. Want a sign? Look at the cross: the sign of Christ and Him Crucified! *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son,"* the Bible says (Jn 3:16). And again, the Scriptures tell us, *[God] did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all* (Ro 8:32). The cross tells you that God gave up His own Son into death for you! Luther said it so well: "We see the deepest into the heart of God when we see His Son hanging on the cross."

Jesus carries that cross, He is nailed to the cross, He is raised up on that cross, and He dies on that cross, and that means, Dear Child of God, you are forgiven all your sins of thought, word, and deed, and all the wages of sin is gone.

In the book of Hebrews, we read,

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God (He 12:2).

We fix our eyes on Jesus to learn from Jesus. Jesus carried the cross, and you will carry the cross, marking you as belonging to Christ. Everyone who confesses Christ's holy name, everyone who desires to live a holy, God-pleasing life and not be conformed to this present age, will bear the cross.

We may not always like that, and do everything possible to avoid it. Bearing the cross is not easy; it is most certainly not fun.

Who among us really wants to embrace and carry the cross? We want to hurry past the crown of thorns and the cross to get the Easter bunny and Easter baskets. That's what the flesh wants – **glory!** The cross is to be avoided at all costs. Oh, how wise we are in our own eyes, that we think we know even more than God what is good for us!

As if being wise in our own eyes did not lead us astray enough, we are surrounded by the lies of the devil, which seek to please and soothe the glory-seeking flesh. Look at his lies.

Buddhism teaches that, although people suffer, suffering can be avoided if one will only follow the “eight-fold path.”

Islam teaches that suffering is Allah's punishment on the infidels and the unjust. The righteous, Islam says, do not suffer.

Sadly, Satan has convinced us Christians that being a Christian means a life free of difficulties and troubles, and a life filled with prosperity. There are actually pastors and churches that teach that material stuff is God's reward to you for being a Christian.

When Jesus said, *“I came that they may have life and have it abundantly,”* money and stuff were not exactly what Jesus was talking about (Jn 10:10). In His earthly life, Jesus endured poverty, contempt, and persecution; He suffered great agony of body and soul under Pontius Pilate; and died in excruciating agony upon the cross. “Who for the joy set before Him, endured the cross.” Jesus endured it all, knowing the joy of heaven awaited.

So, Jesus says to you, *“Take up [your] cross, and follow Me,”* (Mt 16:24). Following Jesus means carrying a cross. God lays the cross on us

to conform us to the image of His Son. Crosses teach us the truth of the words of the song we learned as children in Sunday School, we are weak, but He is strong.

Like Simon of Cyrene, we shoulder the cross and bear it! The cross marks us as God's own! Like Simon, we do not bear the cross alone. Christ is with us to help us bear the cross.

God gives us signs of His love that we may never doubt. The cross, upon which the Prince of Glory won forgiveness for the sins of all the world, and the Sacraments, where He distributes that forgiveness, making it your very own forgiveness.

The Rev. Dr. Luther wrote:

“Our merciful God always placed some outward and visible sign of His grace alongside the Word, so that men, reminded by the outward sign and work or Sacrament, would believe with greater assurance that God is kind and merciful...To us in the New Testament, Baptism and the Eucharist have been given as the visible means of grace, so that we might firmly believe that our sins have been forgiven through Christ's suffering and that we have been redeemed by His death. Thus the church has never been deprived to such an extent of outward signs that it became impossible to know where God could surely be found.”

Sign? Want a sign that God loves you? Then look to those means where He Himself has promised to be found.

Remember your Baptism and the gifts God has given you in the water and the Word. You are God's own child, redeemed by Christ the crucified. Never will God leave you, nor forsake you. Be comforted that God has plans for you, plans to prosper you, not harm you, plans to give you hope and the glorious future of heaven.

Come to the Lord's Table to eat our Lord's Body and drink His blood. Come, and taste the goodness of God, given and shed for you for the

forgiveness of your sins. And, where there is forgiveness, there is life and salvation, and strength to carry the cross.

As we wait for that day that we will dwell in the house of Lord for ever and ever without end, God gives you signs to comfort and assure you of His love – the sign of the cross and the signs of the Sacraments, that we may not fear.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.