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Trinity Lutheran Church
Decatur, Illinois
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NO CROSS....NO GLORY!

God's PEACE is ALWAYS YOURS in Jesus!

Hear the Word of God from Matthew 16,

“From that time on Jesus began to explain to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things....and that He must be killed, and on the third day be raised to life.....(Then, Jesus said), If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me! For whoever wants to save his life, will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, will save it.”

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST,

When you became a Christian you may have thought that the sun would shine a little brighter, the birds would sing a little sweeter, the air would smell a little fresher, your batting average would go up, and you'd get the promotion at work instead of the unbeliever. You may have thought that your family would be perfect, and that your wife would worship and adore you – but the burnt offerings she serves you for supper don't classify as 'worship'. When you became a Christian, you may have thought that your husband would long to carry on conversations with you – but asking for the remote and a beer, isn't exactly the conversations you were hoping for. When you became a Christian, you thought your grass would at least be as green as your heathen neighbor, maybe even greener. And when you became a Christian you may have thought that you wouldn't have to face the “Battle of the B's” any longer: Balding, Bril-cream, Bi-foculs, Bunions, Bow-Legged knees, Bad breath, and Bercitis. However, if you thought that once you became a Christian your life would be “smooth-sailing”, and the odds would suddenly shift in your favor, then you're living with a: “Theology of Glory”, rather than a “Theology of the Cross”. But only a “Theology of the Cross” can give you forgiveness, true life, and salvation. **Page 1**

Jesus tells us in Matthew 16, ***“If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, take up His cross, and follow me.”*** The Christian life is, in many ways, a ‘paradox’ – the opposite of what you’d expect. Christ actually conquers our enemies, by letting those enemies crucify Him. It sounds contrary to logic, doesn’t it. But it’s true. For through Jesus’ shed blood, sin, death, and the devil no longer have a claim on us. They can assue us of sin all they want, but because of Jesus’ shed blood, they can’t make their charges stick. Again, the Christian life is, in many ways, a paradox. Christ actually takes up His reign as our Savior, by being nailed to a cross. And you and I actually overcome death, by trusting in One Who died. It is a paradox. It is counter-intuitive. Nevertheless, it’s true; for Jesus’ fight against our enemies of sin, death, and the devil, was a war in which: **“Shed Blood Wins”**.

This Good News may short-circuit all of the synapses in your brain, but as I’ve said before: Rather than telling God how He can or can’t forgive us, we let Him tell us how He has forgiven us, and He tells us in many places, including 1st John 1, which says, ***“The blood of Jesus, God’s Son, cleanses us from all unrighteousness.”*** Who are we to tell God that He can’t give us life through the substitutionary death of Jesus on a bloody cross? He can and He has! So even if the whole world tells you that: ***“You’re nuts for trusting in the shed blood of Jesus to give you life,”*** just smile, and say, ***“Hey! Join the asylum!”*** For our Lord tells us clearly in Colossians 1, ***“God reconciled all things to Himself, by making peace through Christ’s blood, shed on the cross.”*** Now, if you don’t like you’re being forgiven through the shed blood of Jesus, then take it up with God; but God says you’re forgiven in Jesus’ shed blood. And, as I like to say, ***“If God says you’re forgiven and alive through the shed blood of Jesus, rather than argue with God’s grace, take Him up on the deal.”***

The Christian life is in many ways a paradox – the opposite of what you’d expect. Jesus calls each of us to live, by dying. He says, ***“Whoever wants to save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life, for My sake, will save it.”*** What in the world does Jesus mean “we live, by dying”? Here’s what He means. The Christian’s life is one of dying daily to the sin that would kill us, and rising daily in Christ, Who forgives us. To put it another way, as Christians we put the sinners in us (that self-centered, me-first, it’s all about me sinner) we put that sinner to death in repentance, and then Jesus tells me that I’m forgiven for all my sins, and risen to die no more through Jesus’ suffering and death. **Page 2**

A Theology of the Cross trusts God's promise that I am forgiven and alive in Christ, no matter what the circumstances of my life might look like. Colossians 1 declares, "***God has rescued us (past tense) from the dominion of darkness, and brought us (past tense) into the kingdom of the Son He loves, in Whom we have (present and ongoing tense) the forgiveness of sins, and the redemption of the body.***" This Good News is God's ultimate reality for our lives no matter what: even if my life is in a shambles, my marriage is on the rocks, my finances are headed south, and all of the evidence in my life seems to be shouting that God doesn't love me or care about me. Nevertheless, the message of the cross, even when nothing in life is going our way is: *Not Only Does God love you and forgive you! But He never stopped loving you. And not only does God love you and forgive you, but He cannot love you more than He already loves you in the suffering and death of Jesus.*" And it is this Good News, this theology of the cross, that pulls you through this life, all the way home to heaven, when everything else in your life and mine is crumbling and falling to pieces.

There's a popular saying that says: "***NO GUTS! NO GLORY!***" But what Jesus is telling us today is: "***NO CROSS! NO GLORY!***" Without the cross of Jesus, we've got nothing. But with the cross of Jesus we've got everything. In other words, thru Jesus' shed blood, His substitutionary death, and His victorious resurrection – great and glorious things have been given to you and me, no matter how messed up our lives may be, and even if our bodies are dying. Why? Because Jesus fought the war against my enemies for me, and this was a war in which shed blood wins! It's really not rocket science. Jesus' shed blood has forgiven us every sin we ever did wrong, every sin that made God mad at us, every sin that kept us out of heaven, every sin that deserved death, and every sin that broke relationship with God. As a result, my life is found in Jesus alone, no matter how much or how little I have in this life. That's a theology of the cross, by which Christians live well, and die well.

Up until today's text, Jesus' disciples were having lots of fun following Jesus. They got to see the pyrotechnics or fireworks of Jesus casting out demons, healing diseases, walking on water, and raising the dead. Those are the kinds of things that draw crowds. Can you imagine how full our church would be if we were raising dead bodies back to life every Sunday. The fact is, we are. But it's a two-stage process. First, we raise the dead back to life, spiritually, by forgiving them their sins through Baptism and the Word of God. But for many that's not impressive enough to get out of bed. **Page 3**

But that's just the first step, but an absolutely necessary step, of a two-step process in which Jesus is raising the dead. The second step will happen on the last day when Jesus will raise the bodies of all believers back to life again when He returns. But because our being raised to life is a two-stage process; and people don't see the fireworks of dead bodies coming back to life, as Jesus did when He raised Lazarus from the dead, they cut themselves off from the Word of God, and their own being raised anew each day to new life in Christ. Jesus said in John 6 ***“Whoever believes in Me, already has eternal life (that’s the first resurrection – the first step of a two-step resurrection).***

If we were literally raising corpses back to life on Sunday, our pews would be packed, but what many refuse to believe is that through the life-giving words of Jesus, when one is told that their sins are forgiven by Jesus, and their death is conquered by Jesus, and all who believe in Him have eternal life – another sinner, dead in sin, has been given a resurrection. In other words, you and I already have eternal life now, simply by trusting God's promise that we are totally forgiven by Jesus' forgiving death on the cross. 1st Peter 2:24 says, ***“Jesus bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds we are healed.”***

And all who are alive in Christ, through faith in His forgiving cross, also have this promise from Jesus in John 5, ***“Everyone who believes in Me already has eternal life, and will not be condemned. He has already crossed over from death unto life. Believe me when I say, a time is coming when all those who are in their graves will hear His voice, and they will come out of their graves, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned, and those who have done good (which is always out of faith in Jesus) will rise to live forever.”***

The point Jesus is making is that without His shed blood and forgiving death we have nothing: NO CROSS....NO GLORY! But through His shed blood and forgiving death we have everything; forgiveness, life, salvation, and the entire kingdom of God is ours' in Jesus, no matter how many sorrows or sufferings we face in this life. Why? Here's why: at the cross, God forensically and legally placed all of our sins on Jesus, and asked Him to pay for them. And, at the cross, the Lord legally and forensically declared you forgiven thru the blood of the Lamb. John 1:29, ***“Behold! The Lamb of God (Jesus) Who takes away the sin of the world.”*** So rather than argue with God, take Him up on the deal that by the cross of Jesus you have life forevermore. **Page 4**

Sadly, Jesus' disciples, like us, were living with a "Theology of Glory". They believed that in following Jesus He would heal all of their diseases, fill their stomachs, pad their pockets, lower their taxes, and give them a sort of heaven on earth. Maybe you've been living with a "Theology of Glory" too; believing that since you are now a Christian, everything's supposed to "GO MY WAY". But the point that Jesus is making today is this: that in Jesus' death, you have forgiveness, life, salvation and the entire kingdom of God, even when nothing in life is going your way. And we cling to that Good news to pull us through this tear-filled life, on a sinfully broken world, all the way to heaven. This is a theology of the cross. It is a life with Jesus and His forgiving cross at the dead center of my life. A theology of the cross declares the Good News that: *"No matter where my life is falling pieces, the cross of Jesus still stands firm and forgiving. And now matter how full my life is with sufferings and problems, the tomb of Jesus is still empty, promising me life and salvation!"*

This is actually the most comforting message ever given to us; namely, that: *"I am alive, even in my dying body; and the whole kingdom of God is mine in Jesus, even if I lose everything I possess in this life."* The world defines greatness and glory as: *"everything going our way on planet earth."* But Jesus defines greatness and glory as: *"Whoever believes in Me already has eternal life, and will not be condemned, He has already crossed over from death until life, and I will raise him up on the last day."*

Jesus' disciples, like us often times, were living with a Theology of Glory, namely: *"everything going our way on planet earth."* Which is why Jesus had to lay it on the line in Matthew 16, and tell his disciples and us, the only way you can have true life and true glory, is this: *"The Son of Man must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things, and He must be killed, and on the third day be raised to life."* **NO CROSS! NO GLORY!**

Let me assure you, Jesus was God's dearly loved and precious Son; but did everything go great for Jesus? No at all! Things were not going well for Jesus as they arrested Him and beat the pulp out of Him. Things were not going well for Jesus as they nailed His hands and feet to the tree of the cross. And things were not going well for Jesus, as God legally and forensically punished Him with the full blown wrath we deserved.

Yet, through Jesus' death, through His cross, you and I receive truly great and glorious things: forgiveness for every sin we ever did wrong, life instead of death, heaven instead of hell, a way out of grave on the last day, and a permanent home in heaven. And these gifts remain ours' in Jesus, no matter how little or how much we have in this life.

In the end, God's Word declares: "***Your life is hidden with God in Christ***". Although it's a paradox, we actually find and have life, by dying. We put our sinful, self-centered, it's-all-about-me lives to death in repentance, and Jesus gives us true life, real life, and eternal life back to us, as He declares an entirely new reality to us in 1st John 1, "***The blood of Jesus, God's Son, cleanses us from all unrighteousness***", and in 1st John 5, "***and whoever has the Son, has life.***" Period. End of discussion. Reality. Amen.