

## Glorying in the Cross

*But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. ~ GALATIANS 6:14 (KJV)*

**O**n the day of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the day we call Palm Sunday, Jesus spoke to the people about His impending death. He said, "Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour ... And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:27,32). Earlier in His ministry Jesus had said, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him" (John 3:14-15).

The cross, as horrific as it was, was not a defeat for Jesus; it was the very purpose for which He came into the world. Lesslie Newbigin, in his book, *Mission in Christ's Way*, says, "The cross is not a defeat reversed by the resurrection; it is a victory proclaimed by the resurrection." In her monumental book, *The Crucifixion*, Fleming Rutledge says, "The crucifixion is the touchstone of Christian authenticity, the unique feature by which everything else, including the resurrection, is given its true significance" (p. 44).

The Apostle Paul wrote: "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2).

To the Galatian church Paul wrote: "God forbid that I should boast (glory) except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ..." (Galatians 6:14 NKJV). With that verse in mind, a young Sir John Bowring, a remarkably gifted linguist and servant of the British government in the 1800s, penned these words, which have become a well-known hymn: "In the cross of Christ I glory, tow'ring o'er the wrecks of time; all the light of sacred story gathers round its head sublime." The opening line, "In the cross of Christ I glory" is inscribed on his gravestone as his testimony.

As we move through this Lenten season toward the remembrance of the crucifixion, let us do so with a great sense of "glorying" in the cross, otherwise why do we call it Good Friday? Yes, we remember the gruesome agony of the crucifixion, but again it was not a defeat but a victory for Jesus, and for us, for by it He conquered sin and death once and for all.

*Father, we thank you for the cross, knowing it was not a defeat for Jesus, but rather was His greatest hour, and by it we may have eternal life. Help us to always "glory" in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.*

REV. GARY TURK  
MOUNT ROYAL, NJ

## Hope

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. ~ 1 PETER 1:3 (ESV)*

**H**ope! Hope is an essential quality in healthy living. I read somewhere that hope enhances our coping skills and improves our quality of life. Conversely, a lack of hope produces a negative impact on our life.

When I look into the eyes of my grandson and great-granddaughter, I see hope for the future. I see hope in the buds forming on the trees and in the green spikes of daffodils and hyacinths poking through the soil. But even greater is my hope in Jesus. He truly is my living hope. I can sing the words of the praise song by Aaron Shust, “My hope is in You, Lord. My strength is in You, Lord. My life is in You, Lord.”

As we approach Good Friday, I cannot help thinking how hope was vanquished for the disciples and for Mary as they witnessed the death of Jesus. Their hope had to have died that day. Yet, only a few days later, they were confronted with the empty tomb. Confusion ... and hope? Proverbs 13:12 (NLT) tells us, “Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a dream fulfilled is a tree of life.” Their hope was deferred. Then their dream, like the “tree of life” theme that runs through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, promising life, sustenance, and healing, was restored. Jesus was alive! Hope returned — our living hope!

Praise God, we can have that same hope, and we can say with the hymn writer, “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.”\*

*Heavenly Father, Thank you for being my hope and my Savior. Amen*

MARSHA HAHN

PITMAN UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

\*“My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less” by Edward Mote, 1834

## New Life

*We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ~ ROMANS 6:4 (ESV)*

**I**t's Easter! It's spring! It's the beginning of the season of new life! Yet we may still be bogged down in the drab gray of winter, wallowing in our own messes, sins, and guilt over some ugly moments.

Honestly, some things deaden our soul in this life. Grief over a loss, anger over an uncontrollable situation, and unforgiveness can close the door on our relationship with God. Life has a way of "hitting us upside the head," so to speak.

As we reflect on ugly moments that deaden our soul, we can also reflect on the sacrificial death of Jesus. Or even think about Lazarus being dead in the tomb for four days ... stinking to the high heavens!

Yes, we are truly dead to God until we hear His calling. But praise Him, He still calls us out from the grave. Thank Him that He does call us and that Christian friends can help point the way as well. If it wasn't for His love and mercy, I wouldn't have tapped into His spirit and His power. I love Him because He first loved me.

So this Lenten season, why not put aside the judgment of everyone else who is lost in the death of sin and darkness. When Jesus calls unbelievers, it's time for us to extend the same mercy God gave to us. The joy of that newfound relationship is just the beginning. Rejoice with those who rejoice and empathize with those who are down. Reach out to others. We can meet each other at the deepest point of need even if that brings people to their knees as they have been beaten up in this life. Jesus is calling them out of the grave into a new life.

*Lord, we rejoice when a soul is born again. Thank you for Easter, thank you for rising from death to bring us eternal life. Hallelujah, amen!*

CAROL ATKINSON  
PITMAN UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



***Let us...***

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

*~ Hebrews 4:14*

## God's Hiding Place

*Make a curtain ... hang it with gold hooks... and place the ark of the Testimony behind the curtain [veil]. The curtain will separate the Holy place from the Most Holy Place.” ~ EXODUS 26:31-34 (NIV) (Note: The purpose of a veil is to hide or cover.)*

God had pleasure in His creation. All was “good” in His eyes, and it was capped by daily fellowship with the man He had created to be like Himself. Adam was to tend the garden, eat its produce, and name and care for the animals. Only one bit of the whole garden was barred from Adam’s use, and that rule came with a death penalty. When Adam chose to disbelieve and disobey the word of God, even he knew that his once-perfect flesh was corrupted. In love, God executed Adam’s death penalty on an animal, shedding blood in the first death. In love, God promised, at the time of Adam’s sin, to make a way for man to return to fellowship with God. Just as God’s covenant with Adam was sealed with blood, there followed uncountable blood-spilling substitutionary deaths of animals as God made other covenants with His people such as Noah, Abraham, and Moses. All of these pointed to what was to come: God, Himself, would take on a body and pay the price with His own pure and sinless blood, the only acceptable sacrifice.

As Jesus gave up His earthly life, the impossible happened: the temple’s barrier curtain, which for centuries had blocked the way of approach to God’s presence, was torn completely and permanently, from top to bottom, allowing access to the bloodstained mercy seat for any who might want it.

*Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful” (HEBREWS 10:19-23, NIV).*

When the curtain was unexplainably torn and the bloodstained mercy seat revealed, it was the clear sign that God had kept His promise to Adam.

*Dear promise-keeping God, may we come with repentant hearts to your precious seat of mercy, pleading the shed blood of your only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, for our sins, and asking for grace to live this day for your honor and your glory and by your power.*

JANE HARRE

PROVIDENCE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

## The Cross

*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ~ 1 CORINTHIANS 1-18 (NIV)*

I have heard many songs about the Cross. The one that sticks in my mind is an anthem the choir sang one Easter Sunday, “Without the Cross.”

What a meaningful song. It just makes you want to shout for joy. That Sunday morning, I just wanted to go to the altar and kneel there and pray for myself. But I didn’t. You see, I was afraid of what people would think.

Today, I really don’t care what people would think. I have gotten to the point where I am confident that people need to hear my testimony, how Jesus has been with me so many times when I was in trouble, especially healthwise, and how He has helped me to go on with my life.

We need to tell others to get the message out. Share what Jesus Christ did for us, how He dragged that cross through the streets while His mother Mary watched with tears in her eyes. As a mother, I would be crying my eyes out.

That cross is a symbol of love, forgiveness, and so much more. My friends, the cross is the real deal. He did it for us. There on that hill called Calvary, Jesus died for us. He wiped our sins away.

That’s what Easter is all about: Cross, Calvary, Tomb, Resurrection. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for your greatest sacrifice of all.

*Father, thank you for sending your Son and having Him do what He has done for us. Amen.*

JANE KOPONICK

GIBBSTOWN, NJ

Without the cross I would not know  
redeeming love that sought my soul.  
Without the blood where would I be.  
I would be lost, lost without the Cross.  
If it wasn’t for Jesus, I would be lost,  
I would be lost without the cross.

From “Without The Cross”  
*Music by Rebecca J. Peck and Jeff Ferguson*  
*Lyrics by Dottie Peoples*

## The Wonder-Working Power

*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son, purifies us from all sin.*

~ I JOHN 1:7 (NIV)

*In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"*

~ REVELATION 5:12 (NIV)

**W**hat is the wonder-working power? What is it for? It is the blood that was shed for us on Calvary. Think about how our God created our bodies and the importance of the blood. You may feel faint or squeamish at the sight of it. You may feel pain and suffering from loss of it. This blood is our lifeline; it is our power and our life.

As we bleed from a wound, there is a lot happening. As the blood flows, it carries nutrients and oxygen; it purifies, it cleanses, and the healing begins. The wound is covered with blood, and a crust forms. You are no longer able to see the wound.

This is how it is with God's love and forgiveness. Your sin is covered, no longer to be seen. God has cleansed us, healed us, and restored us. Now there is new skin, a new you. But there may be a scar to remind you of your pain and suffering, your sin endured.

Because of the Lamb that was slain, the blood that Christ shed covers and heals you, so that your sin is no more. It is gone, paid for by the blood. We have been cleansed, forgiven, and made whole all because of His love for us. Yes, there is wonderful working power and life in the blood shed for you and me. As we sing the song, "There is Power in the Blood," we give thanks and praise to our Lord and Savior.

*Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you and praise you for providing a way to save us from our sin. Amen.*

TRUDY JENKINS

ZION UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

### Good Friday

Why is the day on which Jesus was unjustly tried, sentenced, and cruelly crucified called "Good Friday"? At one time, the day was known as Holy Friday, and still earlier, it may have been called God's Friday. It is called Good Friday because Christ, through his death, showed mankind the greatest good in a way that men could never forget. Whatever the day is called, the good for which Jesus lived and died is emphasized on that day.

## Seven Last Words

**W**e have a fascination with the final words of a dying person. With Jesus' last words, we are not disappointed. Resounding through the ages in the Word of God, they stand perfect and complete. As we focus on those words, we look for a window to eternity, and in the process we find a spotlight on our own soul.

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”  
(Luke 23:34)

*Lord, I hold on to a grudge like it was a treasure, but it rots my soul. Help me let go of what I can't control and learn to forgive.*

“I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23:43)

*Like the thief to whom you promised eternal life, I believe in your ability to save me. Help my unbelief.*

“He said to his mother, ‘Dear woman, here is your son,’ and to his disciple, ‘Here is your mother.’” (John 19:26-27)

*When I hurt, I think only of myself. Give me an unselfish heart to see and care for others who are hurting.*

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46)

*It was for me that you were forsaken. Help me let go of the unanswered “whys” in my life and find peace in knowing that you are my God.*

“I am thirsty.” (John 19:28)

*Give me an unquenchable thirst to know you, my Lord.*

“It is finished.” (John 19:30)

*I can never add to what you have done for me. My salvation is complete. Help me know the joy of your grace as I serve you.*

“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” (Luke 23:46)

*I want to surrender everything in my life to you. Teach me what that means for each new day, and give me the will to do what I know I need to do. Amen.*

From *Christ in Easter: A Family Celebration of Holy Week*, Charles Colson, Billy Graham, Max Lucado, Joni Eareckson Tada, NavPress, Colorado Springs, 1990.

## Connecting With God in Solitary Places

*Because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, [Jesus] said to [his disciples], “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.” So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. ~ MARK 6:31-32 (NIV)*

**L**ent is an important time to reconnect ourselves with God. There are over 20 times in the Gospels where Jesus went to a solitary place to pray and spend time with God. He did this in times of great demand or to reconnect with God. This practice of Jesus always struck me as a model to give myself times to get away and reconnect with God.

The beach and the ocean have always been my happy place, which stems not just from my family’s trips to Ocean City, but also from my experiences attending high school on Sandy Hook at the Marine Academy of Science and Technology. As part of our classes, we took regular walks to the ocean or bay to either go in the water with large nets to collect sea life to study or to take measurements of the beach to study tides and erosion. The feeling of the sand between my toes, the smell of the salt air, the sound of the waves coming onshore, collecting seashells, watching the waves, and seeing the vastness of the ocean all create for me a spiritual experience where I can instantly connect with God.

Whenever there is something for me to contemplate, or I have allowed myself to become too busy or distracted, or I just want to recharge my spirit, all I need to do is step foot on the beach to reconnect with God and to restore my soul. Recently I felt that I needed to get to the beach again, and as I walked on the beach soaking it all in, I came across a stone that was in the perfect shape of a heart. I felt instantly embraced by the love of our Lord in that special place once again.

I keep that heart in my pocket so whenever I reach in and feel it, my spirit is reminded of my happy place and of the love and connection that I share with our Lord.

*Dear Lord, may I use this time of Lent to spend time with you in prayer to reconnect and renew my spirit. Thank you for the beautiful world that you created for us to enjoy and to bask in your presence and love. In your name I pray, amen.*

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