

GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE FROM GOD OUR HEAVENLY FATHER
AND FROM OUR LORD AND SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST.

The text is Luke the twenty-fourth chapter beginning at the forty-fourth verse and I will read it as we go.

I think I read somewhere that Luther once said that you can't keep going back to the cross. I haven't been able to find the reference, so take it with a grain of salt. But I have thought about that idea, and I should mention that while I am never going to get a tattoo, if I did it would read "I am determined to know nothing among you except Christ and Him crucified." in big, bold letters.

But that idea, that you can't keep going back to the cross, caught my imagination. What could it mean?

Let me offer a thought.

I sometimes think of the history of God's work with mankind as being rather like the shape of an hour glass—two large chambers with a narrow tube that joins them. But let's lay this one on it side and look at the beginning. That's creation and the fall. Then there is the first large chamber. There is so much going on here—Noah, the flood, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, the Exodus from Egypt, King David, the Babylonian captivity... I could go on, but it all had a single purpose. Jesus described it this way:

Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ...”

That narrow neck between the two parts, that’s the time Jesus walked this earth. That’s the time He became one of us. That’s the time the dust He created covered His feet. That’s the time the sweat of the curse covered His brow. That’s the time tears of sorrow poured from His eyes.

Everything that had gone before came down to one point—the cross. Just as ***[Jesus] said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer”***.

That’s the pivot point—the very center of history. That is the event upon which our salvation rests. Jesus suffered, bled and died so that you could be with Him forever. So that makes it clear—the crucifixion was not the end for us who believe. Not by any means, because death could not hold the Son of God. He would ***“on the third day rise from the dead”***.

Jesus had conquered death once and for all, and if that sounds a little too generic—He conquered death for you, and for me, for all who believe.

That day, that day the sky went dark for three hours, was the culmination of everything that went before—all the prophecy, everything in the psalms, the satisfaction of the Law.

It was also the beginning of your salvation. Jesus suffered, bled and died ***that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*** It took a while for that proclamation to make it all the way to Westminster, but even that was certain. You have a Father who loves you relentlessly. And I do mean you, each one of you. Even with all your flaws, even with the scars of the sins that gnaw at you, even with all that baggage, He wants to see you face to face. He wants the glory of His shining face, a glory so pure, so bright it would kill us if we saw Him right now, to fall on you and bring you joy unspeakable.

This is all the more amazing because God knows you—really knows you, and still Jesus was willing to die for you. Sin has done everything in its power to claim you. We have all suffered its blows. We have all listened to satan's lies. We have all fallen short of what God demands.

Listen now to the proclamation of God, the proclamation of the forgiveness of sin.

The cross was the culmination of all that went before. It was also the beginning. Death has lost its sting and the Victor, our Victor took His rightful place in glory. We get a glimpse of that glory in what happened next. Jesus said, ***“And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you”.*** That promise is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, who we receive in our baptism. Jesus did not leave us alone. We have His Word. We have Him in the physical means of the sacraments. We have His spirit.

God is faithful. He will never leave you alone. He is with you and in His body the church now and forever. That day ***[Jesus] led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven.*** There He intercedes for us before the Father. He is our High Priest. He is our advocate.

I can't imagine what was going on in the minds, and hearts, of the people who watched Jesus being carried up into heaven that day. They certainly were filled with joy. Luke wrote, ***“they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God”***. But I am sure they were not looking back at the cross in that moment.

We must never forget the cross. Nor are we to stay at the foot of the cross with our eyes fixed there. Jesus endured that horror so that we won't have to endure the death and eternal suffering we deserve, and He said ***“it is finished”***. So, just as the those gathered that day to watch Jesus return to the Father, our eyes are on the risen Christ. ***He is risen indeed!*** So, we wait—not with empty hearts, but with great joy; not sitting on our hands, but as Paul wrote, we ***“press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”***.

In that shape of history we talked about earlier, the church grows until the end of time, until we finally see the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit face to face in all their glory. Maybe it's wrong to think about that future as being closed, for it does not end. It knows no limits. The future is big enough for all who repent and turn to God.

Amen

NOW MAY THE PEACE OF GOD WHICH PASSES ALL UNDERSTANDING, KEEP YOUR HEARTS AND MINDS THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS IN TO LIFE EVERLASTING.