

Maundy Thursday
April 18, 2019
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
The Crosses of Lent: The Celtic Cross – Redemption

Dear Friends in Christ,

On this Maundy Thursday evening we consider the Celtic Cross. It is a simple cross like we are used to seeing with one addition. There is a circle on this cross. Circles have no beginning and no end. Sometimes the Trinity is represented with three interlocking circles for our God has no beginning and no end. The Father is eternal. The Son is eternal. The Holy Spirit is eternal. The Celtic cross reminds us that the eternal God went to the cross in the person of Jesus Christ. The eternal Son of God died to bring eternal redemption to all people. The word of God for us to consider is:

Colossians 1:19–23

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.²¹ Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.²² But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—²³ if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

There were some in Colosse who seemed to be teaching that the gospel Paul brought to them was too simple. They were able to teach higher things about God's fullness and perfection. They were receiving special revelations about God that Paul did not. They were on a higher level of spirituality from what Paul taught. This false teaching seems to be a mixture between following the Old Testament laws and pagan philosophy. The Jews would want to follow the dietary and ceremonial laws. The Greeks especially would be influenced by the philosophy that says that the physical is bad and the spiritual is good. The body is bad but the soul is good. Such people might love to discuss the mysteries of God, the characteristics of God that God has not revealed to us.

Christ does not fit in with either philosophy. He did not come to enforce levitical laws. He came to fulfill the law. And Christ did not come to have academic debates about the mysteries of God. He came to reveal God to sinful men. For in Christ all the fullness of the deity dwells. Christ is the eternal God clothed in human flesh. He is the eternal God in a physical body that had a beginning and will die.

How can the infinite be contained in the finite? In Christ. How can the eternal be contained by the temporal? In Christ. How can God be man? In the person of Jesus Christ. The heretics in Colosse wanted to know the eternal God but did not want the physical Jesus. But this is exactly how God is revealed to us. Jesus reveals the Father to us. If you want to know the eternal God, look at Jesus.

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.²² But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation

Maybe there are times you have felt alienated from God, all alone in this world, all alone to suffer for your sins. Or maybe you've known God in Christ for as long as you can remember. Either way, there are probably times when we have kept God at arm's length in our lives. We thank him for taking care of us, for daily bread, for Jesus and so on. But we aren't ready to change certain parts of our life for God. We are not ready for total commitment.

Throughout the Bible, God compares the relationship between him and his people to a marriage. God is totally committed to his people. He has done everything for us to make us holy and blameless in his sight, a bride beautifully dressed. But we may not be ready for that kind of commitment. Seeing God once a week is enough. He doesn't need to be involved in my work or school or hobbies or entertainment or time with friends. We keep God at arm's length in certain areas of our life.

However, our eternal God is not satisfied with that arrangement. He brushes our stiff arm away and embraces us with the reconciliation and redemption of Christ. The eternal Son of God goes to the cross to give his physical body unto death to reconcile us to God. Because the physical body of Christ is the physical body of the eternal Son of God, his sacrifice is of infinite worth. The payment is enough to redeem the world from sin. Therefore you are counted before God as holy, without blemish and free from accusation.

Satan is the accuser. His name means accuser. And he is good at it. Think of Satan as the prosecuting attorney at your trial before God. Satan brings forward every one of your sins, those you knew about and many you didn't even know about. He has the times and places and witnesses to every thought, word and deed of yours that was against God's law. He has video and audio recordings, fingerprints, DNA and every other piece of evidence. He has an airtight case against us. Then God announces the verdict. "Not guilty! For you are my holy bride. You are blameless in my sight. You are free from any accusation." Because the eternal Son of God went to the cross in our place we are free from accusations and from the accuser eternally. And on the last day, our eternal God will cast Satan out of the courtroom and into hell forever for daring to accuse God's forgiven people of sin.

Think of this wonderful verdict tonight as you receive the meal Christ instituted on Maundy Thursday. In Holy Communion, the infinite body and blood of God's Son are in, with and under the finite bread and wine. When you eat the bread and drink the wine, you receive what the eternal Son of God accomplished on the cross. You receive forgiveness, his declaration that you are holy, blameless and free from accusation. The eternal God comes to us in the simple elements of bread and wine.

This probably would not satisfy the philosophers in Colosse. They did not want a physical Savior or a simple Savior. They wanted mysteries and great revelations. They wanted the search for God to be long and difficult. But our loving God has not made us look far to find him. He comes to us in simple words written in the Bible. Look for your eternal God there. Our God comes to us in water connected with the Word by which he connected us to himself forever. Our God comes to us in bread and wine about which he says, "This is my body given for you...This is my blood of the new covenant poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins."

May the Celtic cross with its eternal circle remind us of who gives his body and blood for us on the cross and in Holy Communion. And may we continue to go to Jesus where he has promised to be found.

Amen.