

First Sunday in Lent
February 21, 2010

Sermon Title: Life Under the Cross

Sermon Text: Romans 10:8b-13

Sermon Hymn: My Song Is Love Unknown [LSB 430]

Sermon Prayer: May the Lord, who's journey to the Cross won for us the victory, grant us peace and comfort in our journey.

Sermon Outline:

- I. The LORD granted the Israelites life under the Cross.
- II. Jesus' journey to the Cross won for us all life under the Cross.
- III. In baptism- Jesus' journey has become our journey- a life under the Cross.
- IV. "who am I That for my sake My Lord should take Frail flesh and die?" (LSB 430:1).

Grace, mercy, and peace to each of you from God our Father, and from and through His Son, Jesus Christ.
Amen.

I'm all grown up now. I suppose such a realization is good at my age. But, having a child of my own, it brings back memories of my own childhood. Rather amazing, since my own son's birth, a little over a year now, I've remembered things from when I was a small child I hadn't thought of in years. I guess you can call these flashbacks.

When I see my son laugh and giggle, just over the simplest of things, then I start to remember good times I had with my parents and siblings. When he sleeps, I remember the times I felt so rested in the arms of my parents. When he gets scared, or cries because he's disappointed, well, I remember the times when I myself was hurt, scared. And, my parents would be there to comfort me and let me know it's okay.

The conclusion I've come to, now having a family of my own, is that a child doesn't quite understand the love of a parent. How deep, strong, and motivating such a love is. Yet, still, without understanding, a child still trust and believes it's true. Even when I recall the times when I was disciplined by my parents. At the time, I didn't understand it, thinking it wasn't fair, but now, I realize it was for my own good and out of that deep love my parents had for me.

What I'm saying is this, you don't have to understand, comprehend, or be able to wrap your mind around the love someone has for you. Love is manifest in action. Love is an action. And, even if you don't have children of your own, you were once a child, and there were your parents and others who loved you. Even though you couldn't understand it, you knew, or at least you know now, it was true, or is true.

In our Old Testament reading we have the account of the Israelites about to enter the Promised Land. This was the longest pause during their forty year journey through the wilderness. In our Gospel reading we hear of Jesus' forty day journey in the wilderness. He was led by the Spirit to that place in order, and I emphasize, in order, to be tempted by the devil. These temptations were something that simply had to happen.

And Luke's account, is very similar to Matthew's detailed account, and to Mark's much shorter one. Yet, in all three accounts of Jesus' time in the wilderness, there are two significant connections to be made.

First of all, Jewish readers would certainly not mistake the reference made to Israel's forty-year wandering in the wilderness, along with all the privations. They knew this about their history. That's one connection. But, there is another connection and that is, in Luke this narrative immediately follows after the genealogy, which ends with, “the son of Adam, the Son of God,” and that is Jesus.

And, isn't that the devil's first challenge to Jesus? “If you are are the Son of God” of verse 3. We remember Jesus' Heavenly Father declaring Jesus to be His beloved Son. We heard last Sunday that it happened during Jesus' transfiguration, and during Jesus' baptism.

Now, the way the genealogy makes the connection between Jesus and Adam invites us to consider something, the wilderness Jesus was in, and the wilderness the Israelites journeyed through were not only places of lack, of hardship, and nothingness, but they were also places opposite of paradise, like that Eden before the Fall into sin. The desert is a chaotic place where nothing is good or right.

Here lies the point Scripture makes for us, plain and clear, as we hear it in Luke's account of Jesus' time in the wilderness being tempted. This point is, the Lord's action all through history, now, and from this time forward, goes beyond just making things better for us. The Lord's action is always about complete restoration, making things the way they once were, making us the way the Lord, our Creator, created us to be. And, really, that is about making something extraordinary and magnificent out of absolutely nothing. That's what the Lord, Jesus Christ, does.

Which brings us to point one on the sermon outline. “The LORD granted the Israelites life under the Cross.”

First of all, as we know the Israelites were at the last point of their journey and were about to enter the Promised Land. Promised, by the LORD, meaning, it was going to happen, not by their strength, but by the LORD's and His action. He wanted them to remember all He had done.

I want to read to you a portion of it, beginning at verse 5. *“And you shall make response before the LORD your God, 'A wandering Aramean was my father. And he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. And the Egyptians treated us harshly and humiliated us and laid on us hard labor. Then we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great deeds of terror, with signs and wonders. And he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.”*

“A wandering Aramean,” meaning, lost, dead, to anything good or right. That's who these people were from the core of their hearts. A perishing people with nothing good to offer and knowing nothing good. A dying people, lost and condemned. They were a people of nothing. We know the reason for this, they had all, as each of us have, inherited a sinful nature, conceived and born into this world dead spiritually, with nothing good to offer, knowing nothing good.

Yet, remember, as stated before, the Lord's action all through history, now, and from this time forth, has been, and always will be all about complete restoration of what once was. Hear it again, “with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm” the LORD created these people, this nation, into His people out of the nothing. He brought them from a dead relationship with Him to a living fellowship with Him. In all reality, He brought them from death to a life in Him.

They were people just like any one of us you know. And, something we really need to consider here, is that they did not deserve for the LORD to stretch out His arm to them, to make them into this magnificent and extraordinary people. Just like us, they were dead to sin, originally. He did not have to act in history on their behalf at all, but He wanted to, out of love for them. He didn't have to bring them out of Egypt, something only the LORD could do. He didn't have to provide for them and lead and guide them through the wilderness. But, because of His deep love, He was going to bring them into the land He Promised them.

This is not to say the LORD ignored their sinfulness and their wickedness. Something had to be done about that. To the LORD there is a price to be paid for sin. The LORD is just. How was it going to be paid, well, according to the Promise made long before that in the Garden of Eden. A Promise of a Savior, who would come as the sacrifice to be made, as the price to be paid. No, Jesus had not come yet, there was considerable time to pass before that happened. Yet, the Lord is timeless, what Jesus took upon His shoulders and carried to His suffering and death on the Cross was their sin too. It's almost as if the LORD said to them, "I haven't ignored your sin, I have only thrown the full weight of it all upon my own Son to bear."

Yes, with a "mighty hand and an outstretched arm" the LORD reached out to these people of nothing and made them into a living people unto Him with lives full of Promise, to live in His presence forever. This "mighty hand and outstretched arm" was and still is, Jesus Christ, the "Lamb of God," as John the Baptist proclaimed.

Although Jesus had not come yet, and His death upon the Cross had not occurred yet, it was still His Son's blood the LORD covered these people with. The LORD mightily and lovingly placed them under the Cross of Jesus to be covered in His blood. They had been given a life under the Cross. Being made alive unto the LORD they were then able to cry unto the LORD concerning all their hardship.

Jesus had a journey too in the wilderness, a place of nothing good or right. Jesus spent forty days in a place of nothing but temptation and wickedness. This was an extremely tough time for Jesus, having not eaten the entire time. Being pressured tremendously by the devil to lose sight of the purpose for His life on earth. The devil was pouring it on thick, to get Jesus to succumb, to submit to his lie, that if Jesus would only give up His glory of being the servant to save all people and take on the position of a worldly king he would have great treasure.

Hasn't this been the devil's temptation and lie all along? Indeed, "your eyes will be open and you will be like God," he told Eve in the Garden. And, still today, he is asking each of us, "did God really say?" Yet, exactly what Jesus held onto in complete and perfect faith, the Word of the Lord. He trusted His Promise of an end to His suffering and a future in Paradise. Yes, Jesus trusted completely that Promise to Him, to all others, including you, me, and the Israelites in the wilderness have so often failed to trust. He did so, so we could receive the credit of having never failed to trust that great Promise.

Jesus had a journey. Much He had to fulfill, to fulfill and meet all God's demands. Yet, no guilt could be found in Him, not an ounce of unbelief or mistrust, at the same time along that journey He had the full weight of the world's guilt of unbelief and mistrust thrown on Him. And, because death is the wage of sin, along His journey He ended up falsely convicted, whipped, tortured, mocked, and killed. That was the price to be paid. Jesus' journey included fulfilling all that is required of us, and taking the wrap for our total failure to do it ourselves.

Someone had to do it all and take it all. Our Father in Heaven has known from eternity it had to be His only Son. He certainly won for us a life under the Cross.

We recall at Jesus' baptism. When He came up out of the water, His Father in Heaven proclaimed Him to be His beloved Son, with whom He was well pleased. Friends, the comfort the Israelites had, the comfort we have, is that the Lord has proclaimed that concerning us. With a mighty hand and outstretched arm He has made us to be His beloved, His own. Being His own, He hears our cries.

Right there in the water of our baptism, the Lord stated, proclaimed (and that's all it takes) that you are His. And, that all that is required of us has been met in Jesus Christ. Yes, in our baptism we died with Jesus. In our baptism we have been raised with Jesus onto a life that's never going to end. This is what He says about you, about me. A mighty act of God. With the blood of His Son He has made us from nothing into His magnificent and extraordinary new creation. Just as the LORD's people looked forward to inhabiting the land Promised to them, so too do we joyfully anticipate our inheritance of Paradise in Heaven. That is the life we've been given. A life verses the death we once were in. A life under the Cross, covered by His blood, made from the flow of His blood, into a people journeying this wilderness called earth, where nothing good or right exists, a place opposite of Paradise. Journeying through not by our strength, but by the Lord, Jesus Christ. He has prepared the way, He is the way through.

By His mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, that is Jesus Christ, He has made us from nothing into His marvelous creation. Friends, the Lord does not forsake those who He has created. Sure, along our journey here on earth we have many moments when we fail to trust what He proclaims about us. We fail to beat the temptation the devil gives us when he says to us, "did God really say you are His forgiven child?"

During our failures where do we look? We look to the glory of God's only Son,

suspended from that Cross. Because on His journey there He met what is required by always trusting His Father's Word that He was His beloved Son. And, He ended up on a Cross only because we fail to do what He did perfectly. He has covered us with that perfection as if we have never failed. All because He has placed us under the Cross to live a life under the Cross.

Here we are, at the foot of the Cross, looking up to our Lord, asking just as we sang earlier, “who am I that for my sake My Lord should take Frail flesh and die?” The love He has for us was made manifest up above us, in His body on the Cross. Can we understand, or comprehend, or wrap our minds around such a love as that? No! Do we have to? NO! Yet, we may fully trust that it is true. And, we do, trust Him fully, that is the life He has given us. A life of trust, a life under the Cross.

Children, as it was when we were children, we could not understand the love our parents had for us. Did we have to in order for that love to have been true? No. Do we need to understand and fully comprehend our Lord's love for us? No. And, we cannot. Yet, it is still true, evident in His action in history, in His body lifted high above us on that Cross. Amen.