

Mark 14:26-15:47 – Good Friday: “God’s Power Displayed on the Cross” – 3/30/18

Grace and peace to you all from God our Father and the Crucified Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

In Paul’s 1st Letter to the church in Corinth (1:21-24) – Corinth was a Greek port city much how Escanaba used to be – St. Paul has this to say about the cross: “For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but *we preach Christ crucified*: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, *Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*” Paul says Christ crucified is the wisdom and power of God. Paul says preaching Christ and him crucified is the wisdom and power of God. The question then I ask you this evening, this Good Friday, is this: How is God’s power displayed on the cross? The cross was an ancient device of torture and death. People crucified on crosses were some of the worst criminals, criminals guilty of subversion and sedition, criminals who were guilty of rebellion and treason, criminals who were openly mocked, despised, and left for the crows and vultures to pick at and eat as their dead bodies hung shamefully from the cross, along the Roman roads, for all to see. How is God’s power displayed in the *crucified* Christ? If anything, it seems as if there is absolutely no power, no hope, nothing redeeming in the crucified Christ. In fact, one of the earliest artistic depictions of the cross– and it’s not really art but graffiti – was found on a wall in Rome, dated to around 200 AD. It’s a picture of a person worshipping a crucified man with the head of donkey. Underneath the picture is an inscription that says: “Alexemenos worships his God.”¹ A pagan Roman was mocking a Christian man’s faith in the crucified Christ. The pagan Romans and Greeks saw only absurdity in worshipping a crucified man who claimed to be the Savior, Lord and God. Like St. Paul said, the cross, to Gentiles, is foolishness. The Romans, just

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexamenos_graffito

like many people today, including (especially?) Americans, aren't drawn to weakness but to power. What kind of power? Power that can dominate. Power that can assert and impose its will. Power that can push around, that can speak boldly, carry a big stick, and let others know who's the boss. So tonight, as we think about "God's power displayed on the cross" we need to think about power in a vastly different way.

God displays his omnipotent, universe-shaping, earth-shaking, humanity-saving, life-changing power in the crucified Christ. How so? God's power is shown in complete vulnerability, in complete weakness, in poverty, in shame, in the complete and utter humiliation of the crucified Christ. Mark's recounting of the passion and crucifixion – what we're going through this evening – and all of Mark's Gospel for that matter, is clear in showing Jesus as the one who must die, who must become weak, who must become powerless in order to display God's power, who must give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). Here's a few of Jesus' words depicting his own self-understanding of power shown in weakness:

Mark 8:31 – “[Jesus] began to teach them that the Son of Man **must** undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

Mark 9:31 – “[Jesus] was teaching his disciples, saying to them, ‘The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they **will** kill him, and three days after being killed, he **will** rise again.’

Mark 10:33-34 – “... Son of Man **will** be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they **will** condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; and they **will** mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him...the third day He will rise again.”

The bigger question we need to ask this evening is why? Why display his power in complete vulnerability, in complete weakness, in poverty, in shame, in the complete and utter humiliation of being crucified, dying a death reserved for traitors? Because there is no other way you, or me, or this anyone in this fallen world we live in would listen, would pay attention. Jesus went this

far – to the cross, to death itself – all in order to show, display, and actually give mercy, peace, forgiveness, and hope to you, to this world full of violence, bigotry, hatred, wanton immorality, and complete selfishness. He came to give and give all, and we responded as humans always do, with disbelief and with death. This should boggle your minds and bring you all to your knees. The infinite, all-powerful God becomes one of us, stoops down to our level, and gives himself away in complete vulnerability, in complete weakness, in poverty, in shame, in the complete and utter humiliation of the cross, he comes to give himself away in total, radical love, and we didn't want that. He comes to give all so that we – who ultimately have nothing and are nothing though we try to pretend we are something – he comes to give all so that in our spiritual poverty and moral bankruptcy we would become rich in God (2 Cor. 8:9) and receive new life, eternal life, a share in the life of God, and what do we do? We killed him. *“Were you there when they crucified my Lord?”* we soon will hear. Ultimately yes, we all were there. Make no mistake, if Jesus visited us today in this day and age the same thing would happen. He would be killed. The “Lord of glory” would lose his life (1 Cor. 2:8). The “author of life” (Acts 3:15) would again be tossed down and trampled on. But thanks be to God Jesus our Lord took that cross upon himself. Thanks be to God he showed his power in weakness. Thanks be to God our Lord was willing to suffer the consequences of being vulnerable, as he comes to us in poverty, in shame, in the complete and utter humiliation of the cross to show us the better way, the way of God's power that looks like sacrifice and love. Power displayed in mercy, in forgiveness, in hope. It costs us nothing but our sin; it cost God everything, and he wouldn't have done it differently. We may tell our spouse, our children, our friends “I'd die for you.” Well, Jesus did die, and it was for you. He just didn't talk the talk, he walked the painful walk of vulnerability, of poverty, of shame, in the complete and utter humiliation of the cross, and he did that for you; and this is

God's power on display. The cross will always be foolishness to the unbelieving, to those who are perishing in their sin, in their disbelief. They like the world just as it is. But to us who believe, who are being saved by the power of the absolute weakness of Jesus, by the paradoxical power of God, we who desire a better world, we have just barely begun to taste and see and feel and experience the unfathomable power of God displayed in the crucified Christ. May we experience even more of that power on Easter Sunday when the power of the crucified *and risen* Christ is unleashed from the empty tomb. Amen.

HoD: ELW #356 – “Sing, My Tongue” vv. 1-4