

✠ ✠ ✠ JESU JUVA ✠ ✠ ✠

MIDWEEK INVOCABIT

Text: Isaiah 53:10-11; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; St. John 19:17-30; LSB 428

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

*Cross of JESUS, Cross of sorrow,
Where the blood of CHRIST was shed,
Perfect man on thee did suffer,
Perfect God on thee has bled!

Here the King of all the ages,
Throned in light ere worlds could be,
Robed in mortal flesh is dying,
Crucified by sin for me.*

The Cross of JESUS is God's attack on our sin. There on the Cross, an innocent CHRIST suffers bitter rejection by both His FATHER and man. God dies at the hand of His creation. He suffers a painful hideous torture for our guilt. Therefore, the Cross of JESUS is not just an attack on our sin, it is our salvation from sin. "*This*", as Martin Luther would say, "*is the alien work of God.*" This is the "*Theology of the Cross*", and it is completely alien to our way of thinking.

So writes St. Paul in his first letter to the Christian congregation in Corinth:

"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. For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.' Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach CHRIST crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, CHRIST the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

The Cross of JESUS is *“the foolishness of the message preached,”* but we have somehow twisted and corrupted the reason for the Cross and JESUS’ crucifixion. Somehow, we see the fall of Adam and Eve as the beginning of some sort of *“Glory Story.”* We read God’s Word and we come up with this interpretation:

Adam, originally pure in soul, either by nature, or perhaps just because he was created from bad dirt, was tempted by corrupt lusts and *“fell,”* losing grace and drawing all his descendants with him into a *“mass of perdition.”*

Therefore, atonement must be made, grace restored, and purging carried out so that a return to glory is possible. The Cross, of course, can be quite neatly incorporated into the story as the reparation that makes the return to glory achievable. Of course, in all of this, the most important element is not the Cross, rather, it is humanity’s regained ability to attain perfection. And there we have what can be called the *“Theology of Glory.”*

You see, our most common misperception about ourselves and religion is this: We came from glory and are bound for glory. Of course, somewhere in between, we seem to have lost our way. Our glory train has jumped the tracks, so to speak. But, that is only a temporary inconvenience. We can get ourselves back on the right track and on our merry way again, right straight on down the *“glory road”* if we only commit to making the proper amount of religious effort.

The *“Theology of Glory”* works like that. It operates on the assumption that all we need is simply a little optimistic encouragement, some flattery, some positive thinking, some support to build up our self-esteem. It believes that we are not seriously addicted to sin. All we need is a little boost in our desire and our innate ability to do good works.

So it is, that one who follows the *“Theology of Glory”* tends to call evil good and good evil. Works are good and suffering is evil. But this ends up in a simplistic understanding of God. This understanding of religion sees God, not as the cause of all things, but only those things which are *“good.”* But that kind of a god is not the Christian God. That kind of a god is only able to react as forces beyond his control act on him. In fact, it is hard to see how that kind of a god could even be involved in the Cross at all.

*O mysterious condescending!
O abandonment sublime!
Very God Himself is bearing
All the sufferings of time!*

*Cross of JESUS, Cross of sorrow,
Where the blood of CHRIST was shed,
Perfect man on thee did suffer,
Perfect God on thee has bled!*

When one follows the “*Theology of the Cross*”, one operates quite differently than those who follow the “*Theology of Glory*.” When one follows the “*Theology of the Cross*”, one operates under the assumption that there must be suffering, and along with that, a “*bottoming out*,” or an “*intervention*.” As those who treat addicts would say, “*There is no cure for an addict on his own*.” We are addicts. We are addicted to sin and self, whatever form that may take. We cannot be helped by optimistic appeals to glory, strength, wisdom, positive thinking, psychobabble, and the like, because those things are, in themselves, the problem.

You see, the thirst for glory or power or wisdom is never satisfied even when you acquire it. We always want more so that we can declare our independence from God. Our thirst is for absolute independence of the self, and that, my friends, is sin. Again, sin is our addiction and as any addict will tell you, the only remedy for addiction does not lie in satisfying it, but in extinguishing it.

The Cross does the extinguishing. It can do so because it is the death of sin and the sinner. The Cross is the “*intervention*” needed. It draws us into itself so that we become participants in the story of the Cross, but not simply participants—the Cross *becomes* our story.

This means that the story of the crucifixion is our story. We can see in the death of JESUS, our death, and we remember that we are dust. We look up into the face of JESUS as He hangs dying upon this brutal instrument of death, and there, see in His face our own, because it is our sins that nailed Him to our cross. There, on His Cross, we died with Him.

Just as JESUS was crucified, so we are crucified with Him in Holy Baptism. Through Baptism, the Word of the Cross kills and makes alive. It crucifies the old you, along with all your sins, in anticipation of your resurrection with and in JESUS.

Our life is hidden in the death of JESUS on the Cross. Our sins are hidden in His Cross. His Blood poured out in His death, has now become our life, poured into us at His invitation to Holy Communion.

JESUS did not suffer so that we would not suffer. He suffered to save us from sin, death, and the grave.

He suffered so that He could declare to us, *“You are forgiven all your sins.”*

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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