
LIFE UNDER THE CROSS
Sermon for the 18th Sunday after Pentecost, 2021
Romans 12:1-2, 9-13

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Romans 12:1-2, 9-13: ¹ **Therefore, I appeal to you, fellow-Christians, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual worship.** ² **Do not conform to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, that you may approve of what God wants, namely, what is good, pleasing and perfect!...**

⁹ **Love must be sincere! Hate what is evil! Cling to what is good!** ¹⁰ **Be devoted to one another with brotherly love! Honour one another above yourselves!** ¹¹ **Do not be timid in your zeal! Be fervent in spirit and serve the Lord!** ¹² **Be joyful in your hope! Be patient in trouble and persevere in prayer!** ¹³ **Share with God's holy people who are in need! Eagerly welcome strangers as guests!**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Is death the solution to the problems of life? According to what has recently happened in the Queensland Parliament, the answer is “Yes.” Queensland has now joined with four other states in legalising assisted suicide, or as the bill calls it, “Voluntary Assisted Dying.” For those who voted to pass this legislation, death is the compassionate relief of suffering. Sadly, even some well-meaning Christians think, “What is so wrong with sending Grandma to be with Jesus?”

Such thinking is wrong not only because it lacks *compassion* for the dying, but also because it lacks *a godly understanding* of living. A Christian's view of life is radically different from the world's view. In the world's view, life should be free from the crosses of affliction. In the Christian's view, life is lived under the cross. Based on the Word of God before us, let's grow in our understanding of life under the cross.

The apostle Paul beautifully articulates the message of the cross in the first 11 chapters of Romans. The message of the cross is that although we “*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*” we are “*justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*” (Romans 3:23-24). Because of our sin we all deserved hell, not the glory of God. God, however, left His glory and, in the person of Jesus, suffered the hell we deserved when from the cross He cried out in a loud voice, “*My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?*” (Matt. 27:46). Through faith in this suffering Christ, we have forgiveness of our sins and are seen by God as being “good.” As St. Paul writes, “*the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ,*” is “*to all who believe*” (Romans 3:22). Christ has earned our salvation by His faithfulness and gives us the benefits of His work through the gift of faith.

The message of the cross is that God has revealed the great depth of His love for sinful people in the midst of suffering. This is foolishness to the world, but faith has a different perspective. The world sees that nothing good can come from suffering, while faith sees that the greatest of all good *came from suffering*. Under the cross, we are transformed to live differently.

Faith in this “foolishness” of the cross transforms us to live differently than the world expects. St. Paul says, “**Do not conform to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.**” To conform to this world is to behave the way the world does, using this excuse: “*Well, everybody else is doing it.*” Transformation, however, is that which happens within us. We are changed! Transformed people do not say, “*I’m not going to behave that way anymore.*” They say, “*I just can’t behave that way anymore.*” Life under the cross is lived differently because of who we are - ***redeemed children of God.***

That does not mean we shall always behave properly. Paul says, “*For I do not do the good that I want to do. Instead, I do the evil that I do not want to do*” (Romans 7:19). From our own experiences, we all know what Paul is saying. As believers in Christ, we all struggle with our sinful natures. Like Paul, we have sinful desires but know they are wrong. We try to avoid sin but inevitably fail, and cannot overcome sin by our own efforts. Life under the cross, however, means that we live in grace and have the renewal that forgiveness brings. When Jesus died on the cross, He died for our sins *once and for all.* Our transformation, however, is an ongoing process that will never be completed until our Lord takes us out of this sinful world and this sinful flesh.

Nevertheless, God’s Word and Sacraments strengthen our faith and constantly transform us to live differently than the world. We can “**Hate what is evil!**” and “**Cling to what is good!**” We can “**Be devoted to one another with brotherly love**” and “**Honour one another above [ourselves].**”

Because of this spiritual transformation, we can also live *differently* in the face of pain and suffering. There are an increasing number of people today who see those who are suffering as being a burden. Even though wonderful advancements have been made in the area of palliative care, yet there are many who see this care as a waste of time. Such people fail to realise that even if there are those who perhaps lose their ability to care for themselves and so on, yet, such conditions need not diminish the inherent value of human life. Dying people remain people, and when properly treated, they usually transcend the limitations of their physical conditions - especially if they know they are cared for and about.

This is how those who live under the cross view suffering and dying. We do not see Grandma’s suffering as a burden and send her to be with Jesus; rather, we carry Grandma’s burdens *until* Jesus sends His angels to take her home. To bear another’s burden includes assuring that person of our love and care. Life under the cross enables us to live differently when facing suffering.

Life under the cross also enables us to think differently, to have an attitude about life that is alien to the world. St. Paul shares three such attitudes, namely, “**Be joyful in your hope! Be patient in trouble and persevere in prayer!**”

First, we can be joyful in hope. Because the greatness of God’s love for us is seen “hidden” in the cross, the cross gives us the certain hope of that love. Earlier, Paul wrote, “*How will He not, who did not spare His own Son but handed Him over for us all, along with Him, also freely give us all things?*” (Romans 8:32). Unlike the world, our joy is not necessarily tied to happy circumstances. In the leadup to the recent parliamentary vote, we heard advocates of euthanasia and assisted suicide talk about *quality of life.* The world ties joy and meaning to certain criteria of physical and mental health. When they do, they come to the same conclusion that many did in Nazi Germany - there are certain lives not worthy of life.

Christian joy, however, is tied to the certain hope that *God’s love gives worth and value to human life whether or not it has quality in the eyes of the world.* We have hope in the certainty that as long as God gives life, God gives life purpose and meaning. Christian joy is tied to the presence of this hope and not to the absence of pain and suffering.

This does not mean, of course, that a Christian will enjoy pain and suffering! That’s why Paul talks next about being “**patient in trouble.**” Martin Luther once said, “*Affliction is the best book in my library.*” True or not, Luther certainly understood life under the cross. He understood that just as God was at work in love through the suffering of the cross, so His love is at work in the suffering of His people. Think of Jesus on the cross. He did not bear the cross - He used it! There at the cross was the deepest injustice ever done, and Jesus turned it all into a healing of injustice and sin. There men were at their worst, and through it Jesus revealed God at His best. There hate

was at its bitterest, and there Love met it and conquered it by taking it into His own heart and transforming it. The darkest hour of history became the lightest! The cross became a throne! The end was a new beginning.

God has a way with crosses! God has a way of working in affliction. That is why He never promises His people the absence of affliction. Indeed, Jesus said, “*In the world you have distress*” (Jn 16:33). Sin sees to that. But Jesus then adds, “*Nevertheless, have courage! I have overcome the world*” (16:33). The afflictions Christians face become tools in God’s hands of love, through which He disciplines and teaches. He does this, the writer to the Hebrews says, so that we may “*share in His holiness*” (Heb 12:10).

This is the view of affliction that life under the cross gives. It is radically different from the world, which sees no purpose in affliction. However, any pastor could share the blessings of affliction he has seen - sins confessed, sins forgiven, old wounds healed, new bonds of friendship, priorities re-established, love strengthened, faith renewed, God’s grace acknowledged. These form a litany of blessings, which God uses for His eternal purpose and for the good of His people.

Patience in affliction, then, comes from living life under the cross. It acknowledges in faith that, because of the cross, nothing can separate us from God’s love, and God’s love is at work in affliction. We can be patient in affliction for our affliction is but light and momentary compared to the glory that awaits us.¹

Finally, life under the cross helps us think differently about prayer. We can be faithful in prayer regardless of the circumstances. Sometimes because of affliction, we do not know what to pray. The cross, however, gives us access to God’s mercy and, in His mercy, He understands even our tears and sighs. Sometimes because of affliction, our prayers convey frustration and anger at God. God may seem so distant from us. Because of the cross we know that God understands such prayers. We can be faithful in prayer as we live under the cross. The cross assures us of a listening, understanding, and merciful God.

Life under the cross is a radically different life than the world lives. It is a life of sacrifice, putting the needs of others before our own. It is a life of joyful hope, even in the midst of pain and suffering. It is a life of patient endurance in affliction because of the knowledge that God’s love is at work in our suffering. It is a life of faithful prayer because we know we have a merciful and understanding God. Life under the cross - no matter what the circumstances - is life worth living! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

O God our Father, Lord of all, the creator and sustainer of all things in heaven and on earth, we bow before You in worship, and bring before You our praise and our prayers. In the name of Your only Son Jesus Christ, we ask You to forgive us our many sins, and to rescue us from what we deserve because of them. Come into our lives with Your power, and save us from the temptations and dangers that threaten us.

We recognise our own weakness and know we need Your help. Without Your strength we can do nothing. Therefore, give us the power and blessing of Your Holy Spirit, so that we may stand in the grace You gave us in Baptism, and that we may live a life that measures up to the standard You set when You called us to faith. Inspire us with the Gospel about Your delivering up the Son of Man into the hands of sinful men. Because we humbly receive all spiritual blessings from You, take away our stubborn self-wills, and lead us to do Your perfect will. Take away our pride and conceit, and make us humble. Take away our critical and grumbling spirit, and make us content. Take away our resentment and anger, and make us gentle and patient. Help us in love to put up with each other’s faults and weaknesses, as people who have been made rich by Your love.

Pour out Your blessing on Your Church, O God. By the Spirit’s power, make us one in heart and mind, in the peace of Christ. Enable us to grasp the Church’s oneness in Christ in the truth of the Gospel. Take away from us our pride and sinful desire for pre-eminence. Inspire us by Jesus’ humble service to us to serve You gratefully through

¹ Romans 8:18

serving our neighbours. Give us opportunities to demonstrate the confession of the Gospel before the world, that people may be drawn to Your Son and rejoice in Your salvation.

Give Your guidance and blessing to all lawful authority, especially to our Queen and her representatives, and the parliaments of our Commonwealth and State. Give them wisdom and sound judgment, that godliness may rule and evil be kept in check. We continue to mourn over the recent wicked decision made on euthanasia. May such a decision bring shame upon those who have supported the bill that they might lament and be sorry for their actions, turning to You in repentance and realising that life is begun and ended only by You at Your appointed time.

Be the guardian of our homes and families. Make them places where Your Word is treasured, where faith in You produces love, and where love expresses itself in service to You and others.

Touch with Your healing power the sick, the sorrowing, and the suffering. Hear their cry, and remember them in Your mercy. Show them that You are the ever-present source of help, and the saviour of all people, especially of those who believe.

These things we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen.

The 18th Sunday after Pentecost

Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29

⁴ The non-Israelite rabble among them began to have a strong craving, and the Israelites wept again and said: “If only we had meat to eat! ⁵ We remember the fish that we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the watermelons, the leeks, the onions and the garlic. ⁶ Now, however, our appetites are shrivelled. There is nothing but this manna to look at!” ...

¹⁰ Moses heard the people weeping in their family groups, everyone at the door of his tent. The LORD became exceedingly angry, and Moses was upset. ¹¹ Moses asked the LORD: “Why have You brought trouble on Your servant and why are You not kindly disposed towards me? You are placing the burden of all these people on me! ¹² Have I fathered all these people? Have I given birth to them, that You should tell me: ‘Carry them in your arms, like a nurse carrying a baby, to the land that You have promised by an oath to their fathers?’ ¹³ Where can I get meat to give to all these people? For they are weeping beside me and saying, ‘Give us meat to eat!’ ¹⁴ I alone cannot carry all these people. For they are too heavy for me. ¹⁵ If You are going to treat me like this, and, if You are kindly disposed towards me, please just kill me outright and let me not look at my misery!”

¹⁶ The LORD answered Moses: “Gather together for Me seventy men from the elders of Israel, whom you know to be elders of the people and officers over them! Bring them to the Tent of Meeting, that they may stand there with you!...

²⁴ Moses went out and told the people what the LORD had said. He also gathered seventy men from the elders of the people and made them stand around the tent.

²⁵ Then the LORD came down in a cloud and spoke to him and took some of the Spirit who was on Moses and put Him on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied but did not continue to do it. ²⁶ Two men, the one named Eldad and the other named Medad, had remained in the camp. The Spirit also rested on them. They had been among those who had been listed but had not gone out to the tent. However, they prophesied in the camp.

²⁷ Then a young man ran and told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp!”

²⁸ Joshua, the son of Nun, who had been Moses’ assistant since he had been a young man, spoke up and said, “My master, Moses, stop them!”

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James 5:1-20

¹ Come now, rich people, weep and wail over the miseries that are coming on you!

² Your riches have become rotten, and moths have eaten your clothes. ³ Your gold and silver have become corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. ⁴ Look! The wages that you have held back from the workers who mowed your fields are crying out, and the outcries of those who did the harvesting have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. ⁵ You have lived on the earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened hearts in a day of slaughter. ⁶ You have condemned and murdered the righteous man, who does not resist you.

⁷ Therefore, be patient, fellow-Christians, until the Lord comes! See how the farmer waits for the valuable crop of the ground and waits patiently for it until it receives the Autumn and the Spring rains! ⁸ You too, be patient and remain firm! For the Lord’s coming is near. ⁹ Do not grumble against one another, fellow-Christians, that you may not be judged! Consider! The Judge is standing in front of the door. ¹⁰ Fellow-Christians, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of being patient in the face of wrong treatment! ¹¹ Remember

that we call those people “blessed” who have persevered. You have heard how Job persevered and have seen what the Lord finally brought about, because the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.

¹² Above all things, my fellow-Christians, do not swear, either by heaven or by the earth or with any other oath! Rather, let your “yes” be “yes,” and your “no” be “no,” that you may not come under judgment!

¹³ Is anyone among you suffering misfortune? Let him pray! Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise! ¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with olive-oil in the name of the Lord! ¹⁵ The prayer offered in faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up, and, if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed! The effective prayer of a righteous person can do much. ¹⁷ Elijah was a man with the same nature as ours and prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. ¹⁸ Then he prayed again, and the heavens gave rain and the ground produced its crops.

¹⁹ My fellow-Christians, if anyone among you wanders away from the truth and someone turns him back, ²⁰ let him know that the person who has turned a sinner back from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins!

Mark 9:38-50

³⁸ John told Jesus, “Teacher, we saw someone who is not one of us driving out demons in Your name. We tried to stop him because he was not one of us.”

³⁹ Jesus said, “Do not try to stop him! For no one who works a miracle in My name will be able soon afterwards to speak evil of Me. ⁴⁰ For he who is not against us is for us. ⁴¹ For truly, I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of Christ will certainly not lose his reward.

⁴² “If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a heavy millstone were put around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea. ⁴³ If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off! It is better for you to enter life maimed than to go into hell with two hands, into the fire that will never be put out. ⁴⁵ If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off! It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. ⁴⁷ If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out! It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸ where their worm does not die, and the fire is not put out.

⁴⁹ “For everyone will be salted with fire. ⁵⁰ Salt is good. However, if salt loses its saltiness, how will you make it taste salty again? Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another!”