

“He’s Dying to Know Us”- Romans 5:8, 8:31-39

They are found in and on top of churches everywhere. The cathedrals of Europe are in the shape of them. They are found on tombstones in cemeteries. People wear them as jewelry but also wear them to make a statement about their faith. What I am talking about, of course, is the cross. They are found everywhere. One weekend back in 2004 Kay and I were working a weekend together with youth called Chrysalis and at the closing worship service on Sunday afternoon, and as we were singing we looked out the window and we watched the clouds in the sky come together in a perfectly shaped cross.

We are in a series sermons entitled, “Why I am a Christian?” I am a Christian first of all because of God hounding me and coming after me with his love and grace. Second of all, I am a Christian because of Christ’s mission statement he gave to the hometown crowd declaring his deep care and love for people by setting them free from their spiritual poverty, their life’s prisons, and the debt they owe God. The third reason I am a Christian is what the cross means to me and to all Christians. The cross is the core symbol of what our Christian faith is all about.

The church could have chosen as its symbol the crib in which Jesus was born in, symbolizing that he was both God and human. The church could have chosen the carpenter’s bench affirming the fact that Jesus worked and lived among us. The church could have chosen the boat from which Jesus taught people from symbolizing a hunger to learn about God from, or the towel which he used to wash the disciples feet with symbolizing servanthood. He could have picked the symbol of the tomb, or even a throne. Any of these might have been appropriate. But the church bypassed all of these wonderful symbols in favor of the cross. The cross of course symbolizes the necessity and the centrality of Jesus’ death.

The choice of the cross as the supreme Christian symbol was all the more remarkable because in the Roman criminal system the cross the symbol of shame. The cross or crucifixion was reserved for the worst of the criminals because it was a painful and humiliating death. It could take up to three days to die. People

would eventually suffocate. They would sometimes break the legs of the criminals in order to speed up the death because they could not push up on their legs to breathe. Why then this relentless emphasis on the cross, this instrument of very painful death? Why did Christ die on the cross? Why is the cross important to why we are Christians?

The most obvious answer to why Jesus died on the cross is that the religious authorities were scared of his teaching so they plotted with the Romans to get rid of him. But there is a far more important answer to the question of why he died? He went to the cross of his own free will. Jesus once said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." Let me share with you three reasons why Jesus went voluntarily and deliberately to the cross.

The first reason is: Christ went to the cross to die for our sins. The cross of Jesus is the only basis which God can forgive sins. In history God had a dilemma. His dilemma was that God is love, but he is also just. God's love isn't this gooey Valentine kind of love full of sentimentality. His love is a holy love. In his vast love God wants to forgive sin but he cannot compromise his justice. This dilemma was solved on the cross. For on the cross, when Jesus died, God himself bore the judgment we deserve in order to bring the forgiveness we do not. On the cross God's divine love and God's divine justice came together. In a very simple way of looking at this is: Christ died for our sin. He took our place, bore our sin, paid our debt, and died our death. When we see the symbol of the cross, remember Christ died for us. The cross symbolizes our sins that were paid for.

The second reason Jesus went to the cross to die was to reveal the character of God. In our lesson this morning, The Apostle Paul wrote a wonderful letter to the Christian folk living in and around Rome. In his letter he spends a great deal of time describing the nature and the actions of God. In Romans 5 Paul writes that God demonstrated his love. He didn't just say it, he demonstrated his love that while we were separated from God. When we had no hope of being with God, Christ died for us. Most of us are very generous with our love to those we consider worthy of our love and respect. We lavish gifts and praise on them. However, we are very limited in love and generosity to those who we don't know

or like. But God's love is abundant and it is for everyone. It is a unique love. God gave the most valuable thing he had: His child. There is no other love in the world like it.

The third reason Jesus went to the cross to die was to conquer the powers of evil and bring us close to God. Romans 8 is one of the most hopeful and optimistic chapters of the Bible. Whenever I feel down about my faith or even some doubt creeps in I go and read Romans 8. It is a chapter that describes God's spirit working in our lives. It begins with these wonderful words, "Therefore, in spite of our shortcomings, our faults, our impatience, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Most of the rest of the chapter talks about a life that is dominated by the Spirit of God. Therefore we can have a life that is controlled by the spirit that is Christ-centered, and is God focused.

In the lesson from chapter 8 that was read we see powerful words of hope. God works for the good in our lives. God is for us and not against us. We are more than conquerors through God who loves us. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Paul has a whole list of things that might separate us from the love of God but God will not let it happen. We attributed all of this to Jesus' victory on the cross. What looks like a huge defeat of goodness by evil when Jesus was hung on the cross was really the defeat of evil by goodness.

I am a Christian because of the cross of Christ. I've lived in Southeast Asia where they follow the teaching Buddha. I stood respectfully at temples before statues of Buddha, his legs crossed, arms folded, eyes closed, a slight smile on his face, serene and silent, and a remote look on his face, detached from the agonies of the world. In my imagination I have turned instead to the lonely, twisted figure on the cross, nails through hands and feet, back lacerated, limbs wrenched, brow bleeding from the thorn pricks, mouth dry crying out for water, and plunged in God forsaken darkness. But one who was and is, unlike Buddha who was detached, very involved in the lives of people.

The crucified one is the God for me. He laid aside his immunity to pain. He entered our world of flesh and blood, tears and death. He suffered for us, dying in our place in order that we might be forgiven. Our sufferings become more

manageable in light of what he went through in suffering. The cross of Christ and the fact that Jesus is dying to know us, that is why I am a Christian.