

That hymn really grabs a person's attention, doesn't it! The strong, bold rhythm; the powerful, vivid wording, like: "From the cross Thy wisdom *shining Breaketh forth* in conqu'ring might; From the cross forever *beameth* All Thy *bright* redeeming *light*" (LSB 578:4). Did you catch how the cross is described as **shining, breaking forth, beaming, and bright**. Beautiful imagery, yes! But.... If you think about it, isn't also kind of odd? I don't know about you, but when I think of Good Friday, I think of **darkness**. I think of gloom. But this hymn says, "No! The cross is **bright!** The cross **enlightens** our darkness! The cross is our great **epiphany**—that we will not be condemned! For Christ was crucified **for you!** The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." The cross of Christ is the central truth of our faith that enlightens the human mind. As we'll see this morning, the light of the cross reveals every matter of faith and life!

St. Paul says, "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (v 2) Now, this is not to say that he avoided other topics. Indeed, if you read all 16 chapters of 1 Corinthians, you'll see that Paul discusses lots of issues; like marriage and divorce, the Lord's Supper and its right practice, lawsuits and conflicts among parishioners, the hope of the resurrection, spiritual gifts and the higher gift of love.

No, to speak "only of Christ crucified" doesn't mean to avoid talking about other important issues. On the contrary, it means that **every issue of faith and life is revealed by the cross of Jesus**. We decide to know nothing but the cross because the cross enlightens everything.

Pick a topic, any topic, and the cross speaks to it. How about sin? The cross shows us the **depth** of our sin. As the Lenten hymn, "Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted" says it: "Ye who think of sin but lightly Nor suppose the evil great Here may view its nature rightly, Here its guilt may estimate" (LSB 451:3). Our sin is so great it took the blood of Jesus to cleanse us.

What else does the cross speak to? How about God's personality? Does the cross show that? Definitely, the cross reveals that God is gracious and merciful, for if God did not "spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him *graciously* give us all things?" (Rom 8:32).

So, if God willingly gave up His own **Son** for my forgiveness, He must really like forgiving. Yes, the cross proves there is joy in heaven when even one sinner repents.

And each of these epiphanies leads to yet another: Here's an example: If we are forgiven in Christ, then we have been reconciled to the Father. And if we

have been reconciled to Him, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. And if we have peace with Him, we have enmity with the devil, and the devil no longer has any claim on us. We belong to God!

And if we belong to Him, we are his heirs, and all things are ours. For how will he not also graciously give us all things? And if we have all things, we **must** have the resurrection of the body. For if He loved us enough to take on our flesh and to die in that flesh and to rise in that flesh, then we can be sure that He will also save **our** flesh when He comes again in glory! Yes, Christ **will** raise us up on the Last Day.

You see, the cross is the key to all wisdom, and once you have it, once you have that wisdom, the Gospel reveals one truth on top of another.

So, the cross teaches us the Gospel, but it also teaches us about the Law—that is, it teaches us how to live—and it changes our opinion **about** the Law.

Those who don't understand the cross must view the Law as an enemy. "The Law is bad. The Law shows me my sin, it shows me where I have failed, it shows me I deserve condemnation, it shows me I can't do anything of my own to change those facts." For those without Christ, the Law is a constant reminder that they do not measure up. They hate it.

And even among Christians, our sinful flesh still kicks and screams and puts up a fight when the Law is taught. "I don't want to hear that bad news! Jesus loves me, so I'm free to do whatever I want, whenever I want!"

But the **new** man, the **new creation** in Christ, standing in the light of the cross thinks much differently.

The new creation delights in the Law because he or she sees that the Law is cross-shaped. It's about denying ourselves (like Jesus did for us), taking up our own cross (like Jesus did for us), and then following Him.

It's all about love, and we love only because He first loved us! The Law then becomes beautiful because for us it pictures our Jesus.

We could also apply this change of perspective to individual commandments. For instance, the cross makes us think differently about the Sixth Commandment (on sexual issues). The world thinks the Sixth Commandment is burdensome, but we see great freedom and delight. St. Paul tells us that in this commandment we see a picture of Christ and the Church—a picture of how Christ, the Groom, loved His Bride by laying down His life for her (Ephesians 5).

So then, husbands, to love your wife is to imitate Jesus, who gave Himself up for His wife. And viewing it this way, the commandment is not a burden but

a great joy. It's an amazing opportunity to follow Jesus and show your spouse the love of our Savior.

In fact, every commandment becomes an opportunity to reflect the love of Christ to others. As Jesus says in our Gospel, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Mt 5:16). As followers of Christ, we delight in every commandment because in the fulfillment of each of them we see the love of Christ crucified.

So, the cross reveals **everything**. When Paul says he decided to know nothing but the cross, he was not limiting himself to one topic. He was opening **every** topic and allowing the true Light to enlighten all things. But perhaps,

While the light of the cross speaks to every issue, it especially speaks to **suffering**. When we suffer, we often cry out, "Why, Lord?" That question is nearly impossible to answer, but in the cross, we start to unravel the mystery.

Now, I'm not saying the cross gives a specific or satisfying answer to every situation. Sometimes God hides knowledge from us, and it's His prerogative to do so, but I am saying the cross eliminates some wrong answers and begins to offer possibilities.

First, the cross eliminates the wrong answers like the idea that your suffering happened because God is cruel or because God is callous and doesn't care. Those answers **can't** be true. For if He did not spare His own Son, He certainly loves you, and He clearly has your best interests in mind. So, the cross takes away a lot of the bad answers.

But second, the cross offers possible alternatives. Perhaps God is using this event to strengthen your faith or to teach you to pray. Perhaps He's conforming you into the image of His Son; He's making you Christlike. Perhaps He's taking away an idol that was ruining your life, or maybe He's simply making you long for the next life, for the new world that is to come, when He will wipe away every tear from your eyes.

We can't answer all such questions specifically, but we can be confident that whatever the answer is, it is rooted in His love for you.

Think of it: if you'd been there on Good Friday, it would have seemed horrible and meaningless. You might have asked, "How can a good God allow this to happen?" The enemy seemed victorious.

But St. Peter proclaims that it was all "according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). God knew what evil would try to do, and God used evil's intentions to accomplish His own plans. They intended it for evil, but God meant it for good.

In the same way, God knew about your suffering ahead of time, and though the devil intends to use suffering to drive a wedge between you and God, God **will** work **all** things-even your suffering-for your **good**. The cross reveals this! It reveals God's character-His love-and how He works all things, even evil things, for our good. Yes! The cross reveals all things. The cross reveals sin and grace. The cross gives us a joyous delight in the Gospel, and it can even make us delight in the Law!

So don't move beyond the cross **-ever-** as if the cross is just one of many topics. Or say, "Yes, we all know Jesus died on the cross for our sins, right? So, let's move on to other topics." No! Instead allow the cross to speak to **every** topic; let it illuminate all things. **First**, *let it illuminate your sin*. When the cross reveals the depth of sin, don't scurry away like a cockroach when the light is turned on, but let that light expose you, that you might confess and be forgiven. **Second**, *let the cross illuminate God's personality*. Can you see His face in the light of the cross? He's smiling, because He delights in forgiving you. **Third**, *let the cross illuminate the Law*, because Christ is the fulfillment of the Law, and the Law is so very good! **And finally**, *let the cross shine light on your pain and suffering*. It is the cross that will give you the endurance and patience you need to endure your trials with faith. Yes, all these topics and many more are revealed by the cross. So, it is with such very good reason that Paul says, "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). Amen.