

**THE CROSS IS A PLUS**  
**1 Corinthians 1:18-25**

**Good Friday Tenebrae Service**  
**March 29, 2013**  
**Pastor Nathan J. Thompson**

I have told the story before about the Dennis The Menace comic I saw one time which showed Dennis sitting on a bus with his good friend, Joey. Dennis was pointing out the window and saying, “Look, Joey! Over there is the church I go to. It’s the one with the big plus sign on top!”

To Dennis the cross on top of his church looked like a big plus sign. Which if we really think about it, it is. The cross not only looks like a plus sign but that is also the nature and the content of its message. It is a plus because it always adds to, builds up, affirms and strengthens our lives.

The cross is a powerful and positive symbol that should remind us each time we drive by or enter this space that Christ is Lord of this church. It should remind us that the message and mission of this church is to lift high this cross, to proclaim Christ’s message to all.

It should remind us of those wonderful words from John 3:16-17: *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.”* The cross in our church is a plus as we bring this new life in Christ to others.

Have you ever noticed how we, as sinful people, often seek to downplay and subtract from others? We often say things like, “Oh, so and so is really a pretty nice person, but...but did you know about such and such in their life?” Or we may say, “Yes, so and so is a good church member, but I just bet they are trying to show off by being so involved or by giving so much.”

It is difficult, isn’t it, for us as sinful people to simply affirm others and to put the best construction on what they do. I know I have a lot to learn in this area. We live in a cynical time when people often have a difficult time seeing the good in anyone or anything. Even when someone does some really nice things for us, we are tempted to wonder what they want from us.

The cross, however, never puts anyone down. It is always a plus meant for all people. It always adds to life, never subtracts from it. It always comes with a message of God’s love, and how Jesus died there to take away and forgive our sins. It comes to give us the promise and assurance of life everlasting.

Martin Luther explained the positive message of the cross in his explanation to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Article of the Creed. *“At great cost (Jesus) has saved and redeemed me, a lost and condemned person. He has freed me from sin, death and the power of the devil—not with silver or gold, but with his holy and precious blood and his innocent suffering and death.”* He has saved me, redeemed me, freed me. The cross is a plus in your life and mine.

A father and his small daughter were traveling in a car. A bee flew in the window, and the daughter became very frightened because she was allergic to bee stings. The father, aware of this, slowed down and caught the bee in his hands. But it soon got loose, and the girl began to scream in terror.

The father gently spoke to his daughter, "There is no need to fear. See, the stinger is in my hand. The bee cannot hurt you." When Jesus died on the cross the sting of sin and death was taken upon him so that we might be free. And now even though we sin everyday, because of his cross, sin cannot destroy us.

Now to stand in the shadow of the cross, my friends, is a very humbling experience. To be faced with Christ's unbelievable and affirming love confronts us with a decision. It confronts us with the need to repent and turn from our sins, to change our lives and priorities.

And for some, I know, the cross may even be looked on as a threat that will take away their fun. This is why Paul says in 1 Corinthians that the *"message of the cross is foolishness, but to those who are being saved it is the power of God."* The message of the cross is that it is only as we turn away from our sins that we can be filled with forgiveness, life and salvation. The cross is a plus because it fills us with new and abundant life.

The reason, I'm sure, that most of us are here this evening is because we are looking for some hope and assurance for our lives. We come in the midst of this world where there are so many negatives, where there is so much bad and disturbing news. And yet the cross comes and says, "You are loved. You are important. Christ died for you. In him you are free."

The cross comes to us in the midst of our problems and times of hopelessness, and says, "Christ understands. He has defeated these powers and in him there is hope." It comes to us in the midst of sorrow and brokenness, and proclaims that through Christ there is comfort and healing.

And the cross comes to us in our thoughts and concerns about death, and it proclaims that Jesus has defeated the power of death. The cross proclaims that through Christ's death and resurrection that there is the promise of life everlasting for all who believe in him.

The writer, Corrie Ten Boom, who survived being imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp, summarized this message of the cross so well with these words, "Look around and be distressed. Look within and be depressed. Look to Jesus and be at rest." To look to Jesus, to his cross, is always a plus. It always adds to and enhances our lives.

Now something that I have noticed lately is that the cross is really popular these days as far as jewelry and fashion. In fact, many celebrities and sports figures are showing up at award ceremonies or talk shows with cross necklaces or earrings. And yet I wonder how many of them realize the message and the power of what that cross means.

I mean, they could just as well be wearing a mini guillotine or electric chair. The cross is about an unfair execution of an innocent man. It reminds us of the blood and agonizing death of Jesus. It reminds us that he gave up his life because he loves us. It reminds us that he hates our sins and sinfulness, that he wants to change our lives. To save us, forgive us, renew us.

To wear the cross should mean that Christ is number one in our lives. It should call us to humble ourselves, to confess our sins, and to seek to follow his will. And to wear the cross should call us to a life of love, and care, and giving for the sake of others. It calls us to be positive people of forgiveness, of grace, of hope for others.

This cross, my friends, as well as the one on the top of our bell tower outside, should remind each one of us every time we drive by or come here, that we are called to be a plus in this community. We, as a church, are called to add life and faith for Jesus Christ. Yes, it may be foolishness to those who don't believe. But for us, it is the power of God at work among us.

May Messiah Church, my friends, be a cross centered, positive, caring and mission centered church. Remember, the cross is always a plus!