

Pastor's Message – 3/10/24
Guided to the Cross – Guided to Trust
Proverbs 3:5-6
John 19:29-30
1 Timothy 1:15-17

As the Choir sang last week, “The Cross Says Come” – the cross invites us to come and receive grace and forgiveness. Keeping focus on the cross of Jesus, we are guided to forgiveness, guided to hope, guided to love, and guided to peace. Today, we take a look at how we are “Guided to Trust” in this season through our worship series and our Bible study: Guided to the Cross.

Trust can be a difficult thing for us to possess these days. We have unfortunately become so accustomed to scam artists and persistent telemarketers and spam emailers that we tend not to want to trust anybody anymore. How many times have you declined a call on your cell phone because you did not recognize the number? How many times have you been disappointed by political leaders and religious leaders? We now question every statement, every news report, every request. We doubt any claim. We even question the Bible. As much as we have been conditioned to mistrust it is no wonder that we have problems with trusting what the Bible says and what Jesus says to us about his salvation for us through the cross.

It sounds counterintuitive at first: someone dying to bring life. But the more we come to know our God and the more we come to know our Jesus, our Savior, the more it makes sense. We all acknowledge the truth of our sin. That we have disobeyed God is something we cannot dispute. It has happened, and we are sorry for what we have done.

The other truth we know is that someone always pays for the sins we have committed. There is a penalty for our sin, and the penalty is death. Ours or someone else's. The Bible makes it clear: “For the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).

By faith, we believe the Bible to be true and therefore trustworthy. St. Paul assures us, “All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). We trust what the Bible says, so it only

makes sense that we trust what Jesus says: “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). And we trust that he brings life. Jesus says, “The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” (Mark 2:10). And we put our trust in those reassuring words.

During Holy Week, as we will hear again in just a couple weeks, Jesus was brought before Pontius Pilate to be judged by him. Pilate asked him if he as a king, and Jesus responded, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice” (John 18:37).

Jesus makes it obvious that the path that he has taken by God’s design is the path of truth, the path of salvation found in his kingship. There is no other truth to listen to. “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” Jesus says (John 14:6). At his birth in Bethlehem, the angel declared the truth, “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11). “Jesus says to his friend Martha in no uncertain terms, “Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die” (John 11:25-26). And Martha responds, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world” (John 11:27). Do we respond as trustingly as Martha?

The rubber hits the road when we see Jesus nailed to the cross, when we see his head crowned with thorns, when we see the wounds from the whips on his back. Can we believe in him and trust in him in those horrible and painful hours? Many couldn’t. They laughed at and ridiculed him: “He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to, for he said, ‘I am God’s Son.’” (Matthew 27:42-43). Little did they know that in this very act of his crucifixion, Jesus was being the King of Israel and the King of us all. He was delivering us all from the wrath of God. He was fulfilling his role as the Son of God.

It is hard to trust people when they do not follow through with what they said they would do. But even though the people at the cross thought that Jesus was a failure who did not live up to his promises, Jesus was actually following through with what God had promised through him. At the moment when Jesus was being crucified on the

cross, his glory as the Son of God was being made known. When Jesus said the words “It is finished” from the cross (John 19:30), he was announcing that he had completed the plan of salvation appointed to him by his Father, to save all people from sin, death and the devil, through his sinless life and his “innocent suffering and death,” as Martin Luther wrote, “that I may be his own and live under him in his kingdom and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness...This is most certainly true” (Luther, Martin, “Explanation to The Second Article of the Creed,” *The Small Catechism*).

There is great trust in those words and the words we speak in our statements of faith, the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the other creeds, the belief statements of the Church. Those could also be called our statements of trust—our complete trust that Jesus finished what he started in his birth in Bethlehem by dying in our place and for our sake on the cross.

The cross, therefore, is a symbol, a sign, an indication that we trust in the Lord with all our heart, soul, and mind. The cross reminds us that we do not understand fully, but God does, and he knows what is best for us in the person of Jesus Christ and him crucified. St. Paul is a good person to turn to when we are seeking trustworthy statements about our faith. He says, “We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:23-24). We put our trust in what we already know to be powerful and wise: our God in Christ at the cross.

When we don’t trust in God, we tend to wander around aimlessly in different directions, but when we trust in God and in Christ, our path is straight with a clear direction—a direction that leads right to the cross. Only there is truth found. Only there is trust found. Only there is confidence revealed.

As those who trust in the Lord, then, how are we to live? In a world full of doubt and fear and questions, we should be the voice of faith and calm and divine answers. We should be the voice of belief in Jesus and the cross. There is no need to look to another or seek security somewhere else. Our future is laid out at the foot of the cross.

Be guided to the cross. Trust in Jesus, and as you show your faith and commitment, you lead others to trust in him as well. Amen.