

## *Session #5 – Theology of the Cross*

Read: Chapter 3, pp. 81-99

### **Introduction**

Without the cross, there would be no Christ. Without Christ, there would be no Christianity. Thus, all Christians agree that the cross (or more specifically, Christ's saving life, death, and resurrection as remembered in the cross) is central to the Christian faith. But what does this really mean? What does a life centered on the cross really look like? If we are to rely solely on Christ and His saving grace, how can we live a life based, not on "What Would Jesus Do?" but "What Did Jesus Do?"

### **Opening Prayer – Collect 279 (LSB 317)**

Almighty and most merciful God, in this earthly life we endure sufferings and death before we enter into eternal glory. Grant us grace at all times to subject ourselves to Your holy will and to continue steadfast in the true faith to the end of our lives that we may know the peace and joy of the blessed hope of the resurrection of the dead and of the glory of the world to come; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

### **Opening Hymn – LSB 719: I Leave All Things to God's Direction**

### **Scripture –**

#### **Philippians 2:3-11**

<sup>3</sup> Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

<sup>9</sup> Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the Name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.



*Weimar Altarpiece, Central Panel  
Lucas Cranach the Elder, completed  
1555 by Cranach the Younger  
Stadtkirche Sankt Peter und Paul*

## Quotes and Questions from Veith:

### Hiddenness of God

“People today who seek to be spiritual must confess that God sometimes seems far away. The ordinariness of everyday life, the material burdens that one must live through, the routines, and the practical preoccupations of life often smother any sense of transcendence. And then there is the fact of actual suffering... (82)

“The prophet Isaiah – in the midst of national apostasy, political collapse, and divine judgment concluded, ‘Truly, You are a God who hides Himself’ (Isaiah 45:15). To say God is hidden, of course, does not mean that He is absent. On the contrary, someone who is hiding in the room is actually present, just not seen... God conceals Himself, often in things that we would least expect – a crucified criminal, a book, water, bread, wine, an ordinary pastor, trials and suffering, human beings working and raising their families. (82)

“The hiddenness of God is one of the most profound themes in Lutheran spirituality. It is part of what is termed ‘the theology of the cross’, which might be better thought of as the spirituality of the cross.” (82)

- In what way is God’s hiddenness discomfoting? In what way is it comfoting?
- For what reasons is God hidden?

### Theology of glory

“In much of today’s pop religions, ‘spirituality’ becomes a means to a more worldly end or to the end of enhancing the self – acquiring power, pleasure, and, in some cases, self-deification... (83)

“The ideal of the ‘victorious Christian life’ proves impossible to attain, so we have to suppress our failures, keep trying harder (and buying more books), and present a more positive front to the world. We thus resort to dishonesty and phoniness. (85)

“Luther called this kind of self-aggrandizing, success-centered, power spirituality ‘the theology of glory.’ Of course, its attraction is understandable. Naturally, we want success, victories, and happiness... Instead, God gives us the cross.” (85-86)

- Why are we so prone towards theologies of glory?
- What promises of glory have you sought? The congregation?

### Theology of the cross

“First, it must be emphasized that the theology of the cross, while it speaks of the spiritual significance of suffering, by no means advocates suffering as a means of spiritual enlightenment...(92)

“It must be emphasized that the theology of the cross does not offer some pat answer for suffering, some new theodicy that offers a new explanation for why God allows bad things to happen. For Luther, struggling with the ‘why’ is at the essence of trial. (93)

## The Spirituality of the Cross Study Guide

Pastor Rob Morris, Christ the King Lutheran Church, Summer 2023

“Over and over in his writings, Luther tells those who are doubting...to read God’s promises in the Bible and to hold Him to His Word...(94)

“Another reason trials can have a salutary spiritual effect is that they drive us to prayer...(94)

“Furthermore, the Christian’s spiritual life is itself hidden.” (95)

- Reflect on these various aspects and benefits of life under the cross. In what ways does this teaching challenge you? Humble you? Frighten you? Comfort you?

### Spiritual process

“God’s Spirit is at work in the life of every Christian, mysteriously changing the heart, acting through Word and Sacrament, ministering in trials and tribulations, and creating someone who will stand before God in heaven as *holy*. But this process cannot be evident to the naked eye, nor can it be measured and tracked, nor are Christians necessarily conscious of how far they have come.” (97-98, emphasis added)

- Again, reflect on the ways this is challenging, humbling, frightening, and comforting.

### **Connections with Small Catechism:**

**Ten Commandments:** *The First Commandment:* You shall have no other gods.

*What does this mean?* We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

- What other things are we often tempted to fear, to love, and to put our trust in?
- Is there any significance to this commandment being the first commandment?

**Creed:** *The First Article:* You shall have no other gods.

*What does this mean?* ...He daily and richly provides me with all that I need to support this body and life. He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil. All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me.

- How can we reconcile this statement with the danger and evil that befall so many Christians?

**Lord’s Prayer:** *The Fourth Petition:* Give us this day our daily bread.

*What does this mean?* God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all wicked people, but we pray in this petition that he may lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.

*The Sixth Petition:* Lead us not into temptation.

*What does this mean?* God tempts no one. We pray in this petition that he may keep and guard us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. Although we are attacked by these things, we pray that we may finally overcome them and win the victory.

- What do these petitions teach us about the ongoing relationship between believers and their Heavenly Father?

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**Conclusion**

In ways great and small, obvious and subtle, all Christians are susceptible to the theology of glory. Some “Christian” ministries are built entirely on doctrines of earthly glory and reward. Yet, at the very center of the Christian faith is a symbol of the greatest suffering and humiliation imaginable. The most perfect and faithful human suffered the greatest injustice and mistreatment of human history. When our faith is shaped by the theology of the cross, we do not need to flee from suffering and hardships, nor do we have to explain them away. Instead, with words of lament to the God who has rescued us from sin here in time and for eternity, we can be ministers of His grace to all... in spite of, and even because of, our sufferings.

**Closing Prayer**