



MID-SOUTH LUTHERAN



A MESSAGE FROM THE CROSS

Walk into the church and you will stare straight ahead. There it is! The cross! It's a verdict. It's the junction of Law crashing against Gospel. (It is the sinner looking at God's judgment.)

We can't close our eyes and make it go away. We can't tear a page from the history books and hope it's gone. The trial was over. The gavel of God's judgment came down. The cross is a verdict — and that's final!

Then they crucified Jesus! Could it have ended differently? Not unless Jesus changed and we changed. But of course, Jesus didn't change — He's God and man. And us? We're oftentimes too stubborn and naive to change. Because of our sinful nature, we're so tangled up in ourselves that we can't change either.

We're guilty too

That's why we can't go back 2,000 years and stick that awful day on the Jews. The cross is as much a part of our landscape today as it was when it fit itself on the hill of Calvary. The world has put Jesus on trial, just as much as the Jews, the chief priests and the elders back then. Over and over again, the world has rendered the same verdict, the same conclusion, the same outcome: "Crucify Him!"



Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola
District President

But isn't it kind of His fault in a way, too? Aren't we reasonable people? We're willing to let Him hang around on stained glass windows. We've allowed Him to stand on our altar. We have nice, comfortable places where we visit Him. It's called church — where He should be satisfied we've given some time to Him. But He has disappeared from some buildings' walls and even from some churches because His sacrifice for the whole world is too tough to think about.

Shouldn't He be satisfied with once-a-week or at least once-every-month visits? But His Word says we should love, honor and obey Him every minute, every hour and every day of our lives. What else does He expect us to do? The way we live demands that we join in with the crowd and demand He be crucified because our natural lives can't stand in front of Him and His perfection. We can't fix Calvary in history, space and time. The cross just won't stay put! Jesus won't let it be.

Our only hope

It makes us stop and think. We know better. Several years ago on Maundy Thursday, I saw everyone who communed ducking away as they passed the arms of the Lenten cross. It interrupted the flow of the service. But isn't that exactly what happens to the cross today? It's OK to have a pendant or necklace with a cross. We're supposed to be like Christ. But anyone who can watch me for a few moments or peer inside my brain can see that I can't stand in front of Jesus.

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CROSS

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If the cross would only stay on my bedroom wall or just stay put on the altar, then I wouldn't have to live a holy, Christ-like life. Does the cross in my life mean that I'd be brutalized, vandalized and living in utter fear because the rest of the world cares less about what happened when Jesus died on the cross? Yet we realize that the cross is our only hope because Jesus just won't let it go away.

Isaac Watts wrote the beautiful hymn "O God, our Help in ages past, Our hope for years to come..." There we see it. Our human history, our entire life, the lives of every man, woman and child were hanging for all the world to see upon the beams of an ugly, rugged cross. It doesn't stand for something God once did, but what He gives us each moment of every day — life through the atoning sacrifice of our Savior Jesus Christ.

The cross still reaches out and lays its hold on all of mankind. It lifts up people who are straining against the downward pull of sickness, temptation and sin. It props up the sagging spirit of those facing trials, disease and death. The cross is the eternal scaffolding that built our life in Christ, through His love and infinite grace. The cross is the golden scale of balance where our sin, errors and shortcomings weigh down one side. On the other is God's verdict of forgiveness, innocence, blessedness and purity in Jesus Christ, who stretched out His eternal arms to gather us into His love and mercy, to bring **balance and hope.**

You are loved

So thanks be to God that the cross won't go away. The cross is God's way of saying to us, "I forgive you because I love you." It changes us from being

like Pontius Pilate, Caiaphas, Annas and the angry crowd that screamed for His blood, and turns us from that kind of wretchedness into blessed sons and daughters of our heavenly Father by His grace and mercy.

Yet the cross shows us that we still need His forgiveness and that we may be forgiving as well. We can find the power of forgiveness through the Means of Grace, thus allowing us to offer forgiveness from the cross.

Remember, we say in the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." Martin Luther taught that we pray that our Father would not look on our sins, nor on their account deny our prayers; but that He would grant them all to us by grace, so that will we also heartily forgive



and readily do good to those who sin against us.

It's impossible work if we're left to ourselves. But it all happens because of the cross of Christ — power to forgive and be forgiven. Every sin is forgiven in the power of the cross, towering over the wrecks of our time. Hear the words of Jesus from the cross as He groaned in the pains our sins deserved. See His love flowing from the cross and hear His voice strain to say, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Beyond our comprehension

We can never fathom the details of what happened on Calvary, but we know that by the time that awful day was over, Jesus — innocent, perfect and holy — was covered with thorns of mockery, ridicule and spit from those whom He disgusted. This same Jesus, with His battered and bloodied body, took away sin by suffering an eternity of separation from God in our place.

Christ was separated from the Father for us! Who can understand it? We receive life and an eternal inheritance from God the Father while the Son of God was forsaken as He cried out, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" We can never understand that depth of love.

Salvation's work came to its climax. God's wrath against sin and God's love for us came crashing together. Our sin and shame are erased. Our rebellion with God is reconciled. We became the sons and daughters of the almighty heavenly Father. The building of the kingdom of God was completed in the framework of the cross. It is God's guarantee of our salvation.

Our dying Savior spoke with His last breath:

"It is finished!"

Thank God for the gift of the cross!

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MERCY IN DESOTO COUNTY



whose parents had built the home he lives in. He is the caretaker of his older brother, who needs regular trips to the VA. The chainsaw team cut about 100 fallen or damaged trees on the property.

Another homeowner, Larry, knew God was watching over him as he took shelter in his closet during the tornado. He had no idea how he was going to clean up any of the extensive damage to his property, and was thankful for the team's assistance over the two days it took to clear the destruction the tornado had left behind.

Everyone enjoyed taking the time to talk and pray with Larry. He loved the cross they made for him out of one of the many damaged pine trees that he had planted with his father when he was 7 years old.

Chainsaw teams help with tornado cleanup

Lutheran Early Response Teams (LERT) of Lutheran Church Charities (LCC) were in the DeSoto County, Miss., towns of Olive Branch, Hernando and Lewisburg recently to help with tornado recovery. The teams were invited by Angela Fowler, Beautiful Savior, Olive Branch, congregation president.

Two tornadoes hit the towns during the early morning hours of Jan. 10. The first tornado was rated an EF-1 storm by the National Weather Service, with an estimated wind peak of 100 miles per hour and was 200 yards wide and traveled 11 miles. The second tornado was rated an EF-2 storm with an estimated peak wind gust of 120 miles per hour, and was 300 yards wide and traveled about eight miles.

Kathy O'Day, LCC director of Disaster Response, and 27 LERT chainsaw-certified team members served 14 families affected by the tornadoes. They worked



through Beautiful Savior, in partnership with Eight Days of Hope Rapid Response.

The LERT volunteers spent six days cutting and removing fallen and damaged trees that covered the yards of many homes, as well as removing dangerous leaning and dangling limbs.

The team served three homeowners who represent four generations of the same family. Their large properties had multiple trees down and dangerously hanging trees.

The team also served a 78-year-old man

In addition to the physical assistance LERT provides, the volunteers also bring the mercy, compassion, presence and proclamation of Jesus Christ to those suffering and in need.

LCC never goes where they are not invited, nor charges those they serve. They respond with help within 24 hours or fewer, and cover their own travel, lodging, and meal

costs. LCC is an LCMS Recognized Service Organization.

Donations to help cover maintenance and costly repairs to equipment damaged during service may be made at lutheranchurchcharities.org/give-lcc-dr.html. Select "Disaster Response Equipment & Fuel Expense Fund" from the "Choose your designation" menu. For more information, contact Lutheran Church Charities at LCC@LutheranChurchCharities or 866-455-6466.