

July 9, 2023
 Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
 St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
 Pastor Joel Sutton

Matthew 11:25-30 (Romans 7:14-25)

WHY SHOULD CROSS AND TRIAL GRIEVE ME?
 Lutheran Service Book Hymn #756, text by Paul Gerhardt, 1607–76

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| 1. Why should cross and trial grieve me? Christ is near With His cheer; Never will He leave me. Who can rob me of the heaven That God's Son For me won When His life was given? | 2. When life's troubles rise to meet me, Though their weight May be great, They will not defeat me. God, my loving Savior, sends them; He who knows All my woes Knows how best to end them. | 3. God gives me my days of gladness, And I will Trust Him still When He sends me sadness. God is good; His love attends me Day by day, Come what may, Guides me and defends me. | 4. From God's joy can nothing sever, For I am His dear lamb, He, my Shepherd ever. I am His because He gave me His own blood For my good, By His death to save me. | 5. Now in Christ, death cannot slay me, Though it might, Day and night, Trouble and dismay me. Christ has made my death a portal From the strife Of this life To His joy immortal! |
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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
 Amen.

We begin with the question you just sang in our Hymn of the Day: ***“Why should cross and trial grieve me?”*** (Lutheran Service Book #756) Why should cross and trial grieve you? That is the question asked by 17th century hymnist Paul Gerhardt. Similar to this hymn, many of Gerhardt’s hymns describe what Martin Luther called ***“the theology of the cross,”*** that being a Christian means taking up your cross and following Jesus, being faithful unto Him regardless of the cost, suffering punishments, crosses, and even death all for the sake of Christ. (LW 31, 225-226) Last week in our Gospel we heard Jesus say:

“... whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” (Matthew 10:38–39)

This is how Gerhardt lived his life. Many of his hymns were written during times of spiritual crisis and personal tragedy, when it appeared that God had abandoned him or that perhaps God did not even exist. Gerhardt knew he was a sinner living in a sinful world. He was surrounded by death for most of his life. During the Thirty Years war, his family home, church, and entire village were all destroyed. In that war, massive civilian casualties caused Germany’s population to be cut in half. Even still, Gerhardt took up his cross and followed Jesus.

After the war Gerhardt married, but life remained difficult. During the next 26 years of his life he would be preceded in death by his wife and four of his five children. (cf: LSB: Companion to the Hymns, vol. 2, 345-346) Yet, when it came time for his own death, Gerhardt comforted himself with the words of the final stanza of the hymn you just sang. It was his dying prayer. (cf: LSB: Companion to the Hymns, vol. 1, 1097-1098) After a lifetime of sinfulness, crosses, trials, and in the shadow of his own death, Gerhardt was confident that Christ had made death for him a portal into eternal life. As St John records Jesus words:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” (John 5:24)

So what does all this information have to do with you? I tell you about Gerhardt, not for random historical information. I tell you not so that you be tempted to envy or idolize Gerhardt. I tell you so that by the power of the Holy Spirit, God might strengthen your faith so that you daily have the confidence and peace that Gerhardt had when surrounded by death. Because by taking up your cross and following Jesus, you too, will suffer punishments, trials, and possibly even death, all for the sake of Christ. The fact is, ever since Adam’s fall in the Garden of Eden, all mankind has lived under a death sentence, daily walking in the shadow of death.

After mankind’s fall, God cursed the ground with thorns and thistles, vines, and weeds. The earth would no longer abundantly give over its fruit willingly but it was infested with inedible and poisonous plant life that competed on the ground with the edible and nutritious. Survival would now require cultivation and harvest by heavy labor and the sweat of the brow, day after day, year after year, until mankind’s frail body of dust breathes its last and returns to the ground. (cf: Genesis 3:17–19)

You and I and all mankind have inherited Adam’s sin and his body of death from which even the wisest wisdom of man is unable to overcome. Life in this fallen creation is hard. Due to the corrupt human nature, you are subject to the heavy burden of guilt, shame, and sin. You are unable to keep God’s Law as He demands. You are unable to love your heavenly Father as you ought, even as you are unable to love your neighbor. Your only hope for deliverance from the devil, death, and the grave is by coming unto Jesus. He alone is the Source of rest and restoration. He says to you:

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28–30)

Prior to our Gospel text this morning, Jesus had sent out His Twelve disciples to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, proclaiming: ***“The kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*** (cf: Matthew 10:5–7) But even as the Good News had gone out, Israel rejects Jesus and His ministry. The Messiah Himself has come, and although some responded to His call and become disciples, many turned away from both His ministry and the ministry of John the Baptist, the voice who prepared the way. (cf: Matthew 11:1–19) To some, just as it appeared in Paul Gerhardt’s life, just as it might appear in your life, is Jesus the promised Savior or is there another? Does God really exist? If He does exist, is He really in charge? Is He really at work? In our text Jesus dismisses all doubt as He prays to the Father saying:

“I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children.” (Matthew 11:25)

Yes, even when it does not look like it, God is in charge. God is at work. The devil, the world, and the sinful flesh will not prevail against the Gospel of Jesus. Rather than having the

knowledge of salvation depend on *human wisdom*, Jesus thanks the Father for revealing the truth of the Gospel to those with *child-like faith*. God gives grace to the *humble* but opposes the *proud*. (cf: James 4:6)

While all mankind are sinful *infants* and *little children* completely dependent on God for salvation, the *wise and understanding* are all who hear the Good News of salvation in Christ but reject the Holy Spirit, refuse to repent and trust in Christ alone. They do not think they need a Savior. They believe they will be saved by their own wisdom and strength. Thus, the Father hides the truth of Christ from them and reveals it to *little children*, that is, to those who have *child-like faith*. The *wise and understanding* refuse to acknowledge their utter helplessness and need for God's saving righteousness. Whereas, the little children, those who have *child-like faith*, have been called by the Gospel. They recognize that they are unable to save themselves and are completely dependent on our Lord's divine grace.

Jesus does not mean that this hiding will remain forever. Never underestimate the power of the Holy Spirit to soften and warm stone-cold unbelieving hearts. But Scripture does teach that for those who continually harden their hearts against God, God may very well give the callous unbeliever over to their sins and the consequences of those sins. (cf: Romans 1:24–32) This brings up the question of the mystery of God's eternal foreknowledge and divine election unto heaven. Why are some deemed to be wise and other little children? Why are some saved and others not? Those questions we must commend to our Lord's hidden wisdom and His gracious will. As Jesus says in our text:

“²⁶ yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.” (Matthew 11:26)

Earlier I spoke of Paul Gerhardt's faith, but that does not mean he was any less of a sinner than you and me. When you think of a model Christian, maybe you think of St Paul. But in our epistle text this morning he speaks of the reality of the sinful human nature while living as a new creation in Christ. (cf: Romans 7:14-25) Luther called this being *simultaneously a saint and a sinner*. The Christian is at the same time a child of God and enemy of God. (cf: LW 26, 232) St Paul has sinful desires and knows they are wrong, but when he tries to avoid sin, he falls into it. The good he wants to do, he does not do. The evil he tries to avoid, is the evil that he does. When he wants to do good, evil lies close at hand. So by faith he knows he has to turn it all over to Jesus saying:

“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:24–25)

Jesus teaches us in our text that God alone brings people to faith through Christ's message that all are invited to believe in the one whom is able to deliver from a body of death. God planted child-like faith in you at Baptism or in the hearing of the Gospel. Since that time, He has nourished and strengthened your faith. Perhaps you know others who were baptized and later, thinking they were wise, resisted the Holy Spirit. God sent His only begotten Son to call *all* who are laboring and are heavily burdened to come to Him, for He alone gives true rest. Jesus is not talking about a rest that is simply taking a break from your daily work and routine. You do not need Jesus in order to have a day off. Life in this fallen creation is hard. Due to the corrupt human nature, you are subject to the heavy burden of guilt, shame, and sinfulness. Your only

hope for deliverance from death, the devil, and the grave is by coming unto Jesus, who is the Source of rest and restoration.

The only way to find rest is to lay your heavy burden of sin and failure on Jesus and take up His own yoke. A yoke is the wooden crosspiece that binds two animals together as they work. So at first glance, taking up His yoke hardly seems like an offer of rest. But as Jesus continues to speak, He reveals that the essence of taking His yoke upon you consists in learning from Him. Learning that He is gentle and lowly in heart. Learning that in being yoked with Jesus, He does all the work while you restfully receive. Learn that He gently receives, forgives, and saves all who come to Him in need because of His own humility of heart that led Him to become man, to fulfill God's Law and die on the cross in your stead, and be raised so that you be forgiven all your sins and be declared at peace with the Father. He has saved you from the devil, death, and condemnation of the Law. Taking on the yoke of Jesus lightens the burdens of life. Because of who Jesus is, the burden of discipleship becomes light to you now can serve and love others just as God in Christ serves and loves you. All who take up their cross and follow Jesus find rest in this life and full rest and refreshment in the resurrection and eternal life to come.

Why should cross and trial grieve you? You are a baptized heir of eternal life. In Paul Gerhardt's words:

*Now in Christ, death cannot slay [you],
Though it might,
Day and night,
Trouble and dismay [you].
Christ has made [your] death a portal
From the strife
Of this life
To His joy immortal!* (LSB 756, stz. 5)

Alleluia! Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.