

The Cross of Christ: Our Crucifixion

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[0 : 0 0] Welcome to another Sermon on the Web from St. John's Shaughnessy Anglican Church in Vancouver, Canada.

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The following message is from the November 20, 2000 service at St. John's Shaughnessy. The Reverend David Short delivered his message from the book of Galatians, the second chapter, verses 11 to 21.

The title of the message is The Cross of Christ, Our Crucifixion. God, our Father, we look to you for salvation and life.

As we open your word together, we pray that you might speak to us, tell us who we are, so that we might live for you. For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

[1 : 2 7] Please sit down. As the teens go off for a youth group this morning, you might want to open up your Bibles to Galatians chapter 2, which is on page 177.

There is a new disease that has been diagnosed in North America recently.

It is called Affluenza. It's also called Sudden Wealth Syndrome. Symptoms include more money than you know what to do with, the inability to delay gratification, a false sense of entitlement, the loss of future motivation, secret feelings of guilt, difficulty in making real friends, and underneath it all, say the psychiatrists, is a profound identity crisis.

It used to be our identity came to us from our history, family, from our commitments, from those whom we loved, but in the market economy we are now defined by a series of consumer choices.

And the freedom of choice, which was vaunted as the great thing at the end of the 20th century, has become a tyranny for self-definition. I read this week that Carl Lagerfeld, the fashion designer, recently unloaded \$30 million of his furniture collection in an attempt to redefine himself.

[2 : 5 9] Barbara Streisand, recently married, has sold all her premarital possessions, including only \$3 million worth of furniture. Now I tell you that because one of the reasons we meet here week by week by week is that we desperately need to be reminded that who we are does not come from our financial status, from our marital status, from our asset portfolio, from our education, from our performance, from our successes, or from our failures, thank goodness, that our lives are determined by what God has done in Jesus Christ.

That we as a congregation together and individually are defined not by fashion and furniture or futures, but by the crucifixion of the Son of God for us.

And we read in the middle of this passage, in verse 20, this towering statement. I have been crucified with Christ. It's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

And the life I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. We've been looking at the crucifixion for 10 weeks. And what this passage says to us is the crucifixion isn't just an event out there.

It's not just the great exchange where God takes our sin, places it on Jesus, and takes Jesus' righteousness and gives it to us. It is also a place where we are personally, irrevocably changed forever.

[4 : 32] We are ourselves crucified with Christ so that we can now live to God. This is who we are. And it's amazing to see how the Apostle brings us to this mighty reality.

In the lesson that Lydia read for us, verses 11 to 21, the Apostle Paul presents us with a sharp contrast in how to live. And it's a contrast all of us struggle with.

Whether we live out of fear or whether we live out of love. And it goes to the heart of how we understand who we are. Firstly then, in verses 11 to 14, we are not who we are because of fear.

Now Cephas, which is just another name for Peter, was the most prominent early apostle in the church. He was a man who had walked with Jesus Christ and had been recommissioned to be an apostle after he denied Jesus before the young maid.

Both he and the Apostle Paul are honoured leaders in the early church. Both are committed to the same gospel. But we read this remarkable story of how the great leader let the side down when it came to the truth.

[5 : 38] Not because he changed his convictions and suddenly believed a different gospel, but because of his fear of a powerful group and of what they would think of him.

He played the hypocrite. And if you look at verse 11, Paul reports a dramatic conflict between him and the apostle Peter. It took place in Antioch, which is the first place where Gentiles became Christians in any number.

Peter himself had gone back to Jerusalem and explained how now the gospel had gone beyond the borders of the Jewish faith and was welcoming in Gentile Christians.

And the Jewish church in Jerusalem, well, most of them, agreed. And so they sent back to Antioch Barnabas and Barnabas, when he saw the size of the work, took Paul with him.

And we read at the end of Acts 11 these wonderful words, for a whole year Paul and Barnabas met with the church. They taught a large company of people. And in Antioch the disciples were for the first time called Christians.

[6 : 39] So when Peter, a few months later, comes up to Antioch, he joins in table fellowship with the Gentiles. He eats with them, he participates with them as a demonstration of the gospel that God accepts us all by faith in Jesus Christ.

He doesn't insist they be circumcised. He doesn't insist that they abide by the old food laws. But then an influential group from head office come to the church, a Jewish Christian delegation from Jerusalem, and they bring with them a two-tier faith system.

They say it's one thing to have faith in Jesus Christ, but if you really want salvation, you've got to abide by the law, you've got to be circumcised. And it's fascinating to read their effect on Peter.

Look at verse 12, the last sentence. When they came, Peter drew back and separated himself. Why? Fearing the circumcision party.

This was not a decision based on deep conviction. It's a decision based on fear of what an important group of people will say and think of him. He doesn't stand back and say, look, I was wrong about the gospel.

[7 : 49] The death of Jesus isn't enough for your salvation. You're going to have to subscribe to the Jewish law. Under pressure from influential people, Peter changes quietly, gradually and unobtrusively withdrawals.

And I think this has always been the pressure on God's people. I think the pressure on us is not in the first instance to deny the gospel. The pressure is just not to practice it.

And you and I have people of influence in our lives who we'd get along with much better if we were just able to compromise a little. They don't mind what we believe so long as our behavior does not make them feel uncomfortable.

And when a Christian leader falls into this trap and fails to practice the gospel, it has a flow on effect. Look at verse 13. And with him, the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically so that even Barnabas was carried away by the hypocrisy.

There's nothing more contagious than hypocrisy. We had a wonderful natural desire to please other people, some of us more than others. And when a powerful pressure group comes from head office, it's very difficult to have the courage of your convictions.

[8 : 58] That's what pressure groups are for, of course. They want to obscure the truth of the gospel by applying the pressure of approval. Peter would never have separated himself from the Gentiles if he wasn't looking over his shoulder, if he wasn't being driven at this time from need for approval, not by conviction or obedience or love for God.

And Paul, the apostle, sees the damage it's doing to the church and the gospel and he takes an unprecedented step. In the front of them all publicly, he rebukes Peter. Look at verse 14.

When I saw they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter, Before them all, if you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?

See, there were many good reasons for Paul not to raise this in public with Peter. I mean, Peter was a very important and impressive apostle and he's surrounded by the boys from head office.

And have you noticed how much the apostle Paul hates conflict? If you read through his letters, notice the number of times that he makes ground and compromises on the edges and how many times he calls people to the unity, to maintain the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace.

[10 : 14] It would have been much easier for Paul not to publicly rebuke Peter. It would have been easy for him to listen to those who are saying, don't rock the boat, just cooperate. It would have been much easier for Paul to have listened to the modern theologian who had said, listen, it's good for us to have different Gospels.

Our diversity and our tolerance shows how wonderful we are as an organization. But what the apostle Paul sees is that when the truth of the Gospel is at stake, diversity is disobedience.

It's supremely important to make a public stand. Just cast your eyes back to chapter 1, verse 8 and 9 to see how important Paul thinks this is. He says, even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a Gospel contrary to that which we preach to you, let him be accursed.

As I've said before, I say again, if anyone is preaching to you a Gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed. There is such a thing as truth. It's not negotiable and all the pressure and all the opinions and all the choices in the world don't change the basic nature of the Gospel.

And we're not told the immediate reaction of Peter but years later, just before he dies, he writes in his second letter and he refers to Paul.

[11 : 31] And he doesn't just refer to him as Paul and he doesn't just refer to him as our beloved, our brother Paul but with obvious and genuine affection he calls him our beloved brother Paul because Peter realized that his actions were in direct contradiction to the Gospel, that he had acted out of fear of others.

But as followers of Jesus Christ, we are not who we are because of fear. Who are we? That moves us to the second side of the contrast and in verses 15 to 21, we are who we are because of love.

Now in these verses the Paul, the Apostle opens for us the truth of the Gospel. If you cast your eyes down you can see that at the heart of the Gospel is this idea of justification.

Just look at verse 16. We know that a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. Even we, Jewish Christians, have believed in Christ Jesus in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law just in case we missed it because by works of the law shall no one be justified.

You see, justification by faith is what makes all other approval and disapproval utterly irrelevant. We are trying constantly to justify ourselves to one another looking over our shoulder worried about what others think but justification by faith is about what God thinks.

[12 : 57] In fact, it is about the fact that in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, the great verdict of God on the last day has been brought into the now and already declared.

That when Jesus comes again to judge the living and the dead, those who turn from their sins and place their faith in Jesus Christ will be, are justified. justified. And the miracle of justification is that we know about it now.

And what that means is that our fundamental understanding of ourselves does not come from approval or disapproval of any person, no matter how important or beautiful or theologically influential, but from God himself.

And when we act out of fear, as Peter did, what we are trying to do is we are trying to build our own justification, build our own little tower of morality or achievement. But justification by faith is not a renovation or a redecoration.

It is being made right by God through the death of Jesus Christ. And that's why Paul says it doesn't come by works. It doesn't come through self-help. It doesn't come through acceptance by other people.

[14 : 06] It comes by the radical personal acceptance won for us through the death of Jesus on the cross. All that stood between me and God, everything, all my guilt, the curse that I rightly deserve from the law, Jesus Christ has become that curse and taken it from me.

And that's why Paul speaks for every single one of us when he says in verse 20, I am crucified with Christ. It's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

Do you find that an astounding thing to say? He says, the death of Jesus doesn't just have a vague effect on me, but when I place my faith on Jesus Christ, I die in his death.

I am co-crucified with him. So the justification isn't just a legal fiction, it is a living union with the person of Jesus Christ.

It changes me at the deepest core of who I am. It means that my life is no longer centered and focused and lived out of me, but out of Jesus Christ.

[15 : 12] Christ. And I think the idea of being crucified with Christ is alarming and intimidating and it's meant to be. It's a perfect description of what it means to become a Christian. It means the absolute end to one sort of life, that life where self is coddled and admired and indulged, that life where I live based on fear of approval and disapproval.

and it means the beginning of a new life, a living sacrifice, a life lived in the light of justification, a life of actual real communion with Jesus Christ, where my life is not determined by my self-effort, a life where I know that I'm sinful but I know that God looks at me as righteous.

That's why he says it's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. It's not that our personalities cease to exist, but that our true lives are animated by communion with Christ.

Every Christian looks at themselves in amazement from time to time and says, that wasn't me, that was Christ in me. And where does this come from? Where does this power, where does this transformation come from?

It comes from faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. This, this is who we are, says Paul. We are defined by this, the Son of God loved me and gave himself for me.

[16 : 32] The core of who I am is in the cross of Jesus Christ because it's in the cross that I find freedom, freedom from trying to justify myself before God, freedom to accept the fact that I am a sinful person, that I don't need to blame God or my parents or my children or my society.

Fundamentally, it's freedom from being defined by anything, by any economic or social or political reality. freedom to be defined by that one act of love on the cross where God poured out his life for us so that I might be crucified with him and justified by him and that I might live for God.

It's a very important passage for us today and I think it's particularly important because my fear is that we find it easier to be Peter rather than Paul.

But although we've come to believe in Jesus Christ, we are not free. We are very much in bondage. We continue to allow the world to define us, to tell us what to think and to tell us how to live rather than the cross.

And our hopes and our dreams and our plans and our decisions for us and for our children are often more shaped by the culture than by the cross. But we are not who we are because of fear.

[17 : 54] We are who we are because of love and not just any love but the love of God who gave himself for us that he might rescue us from this world and enable us to serve him and to serve one another for the glory of God.

This is who we are. Amen. That address is www.stjohns.org www.stjohns.org www.stjohns.org On the website, you will also find information about ministries, worship services, and special events at St. John's Shaughnessy.

We hope that this sermon on the web has helped you and that you will share it with others. Thank you zapes! www.stjohns.org Thank you.