

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

We've been in the gospel of Matthew all summer, actually pretty much since the beginning of the church year, and today we are in the gospel of John. Why the change? Today is a festival day we haven't celebrated since 2008 if memory serves me correct, and since it's what we call an "optional day", it's entirely possible Pastor Melissa, didn't celebrate it six years ago. So what's the festival? Today is called "Holy Cross Day", and the significance of the cross is what we lift up this morning.

It seems to me to be entirely appropriate on this day when we at Trinity are also celebrating Rally Sunday, the day when we launch our Fall programs, among others choir and bells, Sunday School, Bible Quest, and confirmation. Why lift up the cross today? Well, perhaps you remember just a few Sundays ago, when our gospel talked about how Jesus asked the disciples who they said Jesus was. Jesus' Father in heaven revealed the answer to Peter who said "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And perhaps you recall that it's this confession of faith that is the foundation of the Christian church. After that confession, Jesus told his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, be arrested, suffer, and die. He died on the cross, was buried and raised on third day, raised that believers might live.

Now let's consider our gospel for this morning. We start out with Jesus saying no one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man, a messianic title that Jesus often used when referring to himself. Then Jesus reminds his disciples that as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, during the Exodus, that people bitten by poisonous snakes could look upon it and live, so too the Son of Man must be lifted up, that those who believe in him may have eternal life. Jesus lifted on a cross, raised on the third day, ascended into heaven, where he sits at the right hand of the Father.

Think of it this way: bitten by a poisonous snake, look upon an effigy of a serpent and live. Bitten by the poison of sin, and everyone single one of us has been bitten in this fashion, we look upon the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Son of Man, and we look for eternal life. Eternal life grounded in lifting up the Son of God, grounded in the love of God, lifted, raised, ascended.

So now consider what you see when you look upon the cross on the back wall of our chancel. It's just a cross, a cross, plain, unadorned, without any significance in and of itself. But what do we see? Look on that cross and see our Lord, the Son of God, hanging there, crucified, then dead and buried, only to be raised on the third day. Why was he hanging there? Why did he suffer only to be crucified? For you and me. For you and me because God so loved the world that he gave, he gave his only Son, into the world, on the cross, to die that we might be reconciled to God the Father. To save us from the poison of our sins. So we look upon this cross and we believe, saved by grace through faith, trust, belief, we believe in him and we may not perish, but have eternal life.

Because here's the thing, God sent his only Son into the world to save the world through him. Picture God's love, unconditional love, for us. So big that it defies any ability to conceive of this love, so all encompassing for those who believe in his Son and his death and resurrection, that God's love embraces the world, not confined to a national group, any national group, not confined to some spiritual elite, by embracing all who believe. Embracing you. Embracing me. God's love, shown on a cross.

God's love for us proceeds from the fact that he is love, God is love, not a vague, sentimental love, not some romantic idea of love, or brotherly love or any such thing. Instead God's love is a love that cost his only Son for your sake and for mine. That is love, by any standard, by every standard, exceeding all our standards, that is love!

AMEN