

Lenten Service Week 2

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The Cross is foolishness. That's what St. Paul tells the Corinthians in his first letter to them. Of course, Paul was describing an understanding that, to the rest of the world, salvation through death does not make sense. Why would followers of Jesus believe in such nonsense? After all, the world has always operated with the understanding that power and riches and one's accomplishments were the key to living a good life. In the Greek world, obtaining god-like status was the ultimate goal. After all, the Emperor of Rome was a god.

To the Jewish world at the time, the cross is foolishness because they could not accept Jesus as God's beloved Son. Plus, the real key to living the good life was found in following God's Law to the best of one's own ability.

But it is true, we believe in the foolishness of the cross. We know that Jesus' death on the cross is what leads to our salvation, for it is the power of God. God totally turns the world upside down by showing us that it is not power, riches, fame, and honor that saves us, but the willingness of God's Son to humble himself enough to endure pain and suffering and ultimately death on the cross. In death comes new life. Christ Jesus died so that we can live.

When you think about it, there are a lot of examples in life of death leading to new life. Each winter many of our plants and trees die only to sprout new life again come springtime. Back in 2008 a devastating flood destroyed most of the downtown area of Cedar Rapids, Iowa. It was so bad that it made the national news. However, when the flood waters receded a new sense of comradery engulfed the Cedar Rapids community to help each other out and rebuild. In 2018, ten years after the flood, the city had much to celebrate in its new thriving life. Of course, in baptism we die to sin and are raised to a new life grounded in Christ Jesus.

Yes, the cross is a symbol that reminds us that eternal life comes through death. Because this is so, death is not something for us to fear, for our faith in Jesus as God's beloved son raises us to new life.

And so we sing of our salvation through the cross. One such hymn that is often sung in Lent, Holy Week, and on Easter is *Lift High the Cross*. The history of this hymn is grim. The original text of the hymn was used by missionaries to help colonize what they would call the "uncivilized world." Instead of embracing



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the cultures of tribal civilizations, Missionaries would use Christianity as a way to colonize them to their way of life. This would include stealing their land and making the different tribes give up their traditions.

Thankfully, today the Christian church uses this hymn in a different context. It is clear by looking at this updated, more modern text that the central theme is focused on Christ's victory through the cross; the victory over death itself. The hymn, theologically, is mainly used as a processional or recessional hymn that focuses our attention on the processional cross that leads us into worship and back out into the world ready to continue the work of God's mission of salvation through loving and serving neighbor, as Christ Jesus commanded right before he went to face the cross.

And so, while this hymn may have a not-so-glamorous history, we sing it today because it conveys the wonderful message of Christ's victory over death through the cross. Lent is the time where we work on turning ourselves back to Jesus. Sometimes the lures of the world get the best of us and we forget that our salvation comes only through Christ crucified. And so now is the time for us to sing this hymn and once again be reminded of why we believe in the foolishness of the cross. Victory over death comes through the cross, the same cross where Jesus said "It is finished."

Amen.

