

"JESUS IS OUR PEACE"

Galatians 6:11-14

There is the opening verse in a hymn that we sing here at the church written by John Bowring in 1825 entitled, *In the Cross of Christ I Glory*, where the first verse begins: "In the cross of Christ I glory, Towering o'er the wrecks of time;...." There is a story about the inspiration for these words. The tradition is that Bowring was sailing past the coast of Macao, China. On the shore were the remains of an old, fire-gutted church. Above the ruins, he saw the church's cross still standing. The title of this hymn was carved on Bowring's tombstone. Isn't it great that we, as Christians, can sing words such as these in a world such as we live in? For the cross does and can tower over the wrecks of time, it can tower over the things that we worry about; it can tower over the difficult times in our lives. Listen to the words of the second verse for it goes like this, "When the woes of life o'er-take me, Hopes deceive, and fears annoy, Never shall the cross forsake me: Lo! It glows with peace and joy."

It is possible to sing such words and truly mean it, but the key, the answer is having a belief in and reliance upon the Lord Jesus Christ. That is why Paul is able to say in verse 14 of our passage today, "May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." John Bowring shares with us in the words of his hymn that no matter what his plight, no matter what his mood might be, no matter what his circumstance, the cross blessed it all whether it was pain or pleasure, no matter what might come his way. For John Bowring the cross is always active and the cross always has something to say. That is what the Apostle Paul who wrote our passage would say- that whatever happens to him, the cross and its message always speaks to him, and no matter what, the cross nullifies even the worst.

There seems to be so much strife and turmoil in our world, in our society today- there has been the ongoing debate over health care in this country , the war in Iraq and Afghanistan; there are the tensions over in the

Middle East and now it is getting played out in another way with the Israelis saying they are going to begin new building plans of 1,600 homes in a disputed areas of Jerusalem; more Americans in Mexico are falling victim to a wave of drug violence that is sweeping that country; and the list goes on and on. There are divisions within all nations, divisions- big and small among groups of people, why there are fractures and factions and divisions and disagreements and misunderstandings in families, in churches, you name it. I mean, don't you ever long for rest from the tensions and strains of life? I do. How many of us have experienced perfect rest; or how about a sense of real quiet or real peace? Isn't there even a small piece of warfare or tension or conflict or strife, or maybe it is substantial that is going on inside you? Conflict and life seem to go together, do they not?

And so what I want to propose to each of you today is that there is only one answer to our dilemma that can counter, that can deal with the stresses and strains of life and that is **the cross of Jesus Christ.**

Today is Palm Sunday, the day that we celebrate Jesus riding triumphantly into the holy city Jerusalem. Have you ever thought about the type of animal Jesus rode in on? Have you ever wondered why he rode in on, of all animals, a donkey? You see, many of the people were waiting for; they were longing for a national leader, a militaristic Messiah who would set up an earthly monarchy, an earthly kingdom where the Messiah would raise up an army and defeat the enemies. And so if this was the way Jesus was going to fulfill his destiny then he would have ridden in on a horse- a symbol of war. But instead, Jesus rode in on donkey, and the donkey was a symbol of Peace. And so here we have Jesus, the Prince of Peace riding on a symbol of peace and His cross is the answer.

To give an example of how the cross of Jesus Christ is the answer, it is in the way the cross brought together two groups of people back in Jesus' and Paul's day who traditionally were divided- the Jews and the Gentiles.

And do you know where the cross of Jesus Christ brought them together? It was the Christian Church, the Christian Church brought these two groups together, even though it was difficult at times, and this made the Apostle Paul's heart leap for joy. I mean, you have to understand that in the world that Jesus and Paul were living in, the world was divided up into Jews, and the rest of the world who were known as Gentiles. The Jews called the Gentiles "dogs" and the Gentiles did not look kindly on the Jews so there was this huge divide. In the second chapter of Ephesians we read about the distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles that has been removed in Christ and that terms such as "circumcision" and "uncircumcision" are now obsolete.

So if we could say that there seems to be **one main reason for division**, one main reason **for people being unhappy**, one main reason **for wars**, one main reason **for some of the tragedies and troubles and tensions today it would be because of, what?** I believe there is only one answer that can be given and that is **PRIDE**.

Just go through your Bible and you will see story after story where Pride is the enemy. For example go back to the book of Genesis and the story of two brothers- Cain and Abel. Cain murdered Abel, why? Well, **Cain was jealous of Abel and jealousy is the child of pride.**

Bottom line is that much of the difficulties, strife, tensions, turmoil in our world, nations, and to bring this point closer to home, the tragedies with individuals and groups within nations are because of pride. But do people understand that it takes pride to get us into trouble, to get us into the predicaments we are in? What does this PRIDE look like?

First, **there is the pride of ORIGIN**. There is the pride of birth, pride of race, pride of nationality. This pride can turn to hatred as is the case in the Middle East that has been going on for centuries. There have been genocides committed against peoples, nationalities where 6 million Jews were exterminated at the hands of Nazi Germany in World War II, and during World War I, 1.5 million Armenians were killed by Ottoman Turks in what has been called ethnic cleansing. And this has happened in recent days in Rwanda and Darfur. Why, even the Apostle Paul, before he turned his life over to Christ, as a Jewish religious leader was set on destroying the Christian faith and he boasted about his Judaism and said he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews. And he looked down on everyone who was not.

Next, **there is the Pride of POWER**. Just think about the tensions around the world between the haves and the have nots. Power, greed, having more toys than the next person, being better than the other person is a rush. And don't think for one moment that nations and peoples don't

get drunk on power. It's not just individuals. It wasn't out of his love for people that Adolph Hitler went on a stroll throughout Europe but out of his lust for power and dominance and it was only when this country enter the conflict was there a chance to turn the tide.

And finally, **there is the Pride of INTELLIGENCE**. Ancient history shows how the world was divided up into the Greeks and the barbarians. Another way of saying this is the wise and the unwise. Those Greeks of old were not only intellectuals but they did well on the battlefields. Read some of the writings of the Greek philosophers, some of the greatest minds the world has ever known. And they looked around at others and they puffed out their chests and looked down their noses at the rest of the world.

And so there is unrest and tensions and coals that could be fanned at the drop of the hat that would bring destruction and tragedy. And so we say that the remedy is education- just teach people how to live peacefully, teach them how to love not only friends but foes.

Years ago there were those who taught that if you only educate people then wars will cease. After all, it is the ignorant people who fight and who cause others to fight. Just educate them. Now don't get me wrong education is important, Lord's knows I've put enough money and years into mine. And Lord knows we have tried to bring education to the youth of today- on the Television, in the schools about sex before marriage and abstinence and birth control and yet 71% of African-American children and 51% of Latino children are born to unmarried women (*Akron Beacon Journal*, March 22, 2010, *Arne Duncan, suffering from Sixties Nostalgia Syndrome*). You name the issue- turmoil, war, strife between peoples; whatever and when you trace the problem and the root of the problem it will always lead you back to the person or peoples' hearts. And the only thing, the one thing in this world that can bring peace and unity, the only thing that can bring us together, the only thing that can change a behavior, a mindset, a culture is the cross of Christ.

And that is why the Apostle Paul boasted in the cross of Christ- because the cross of Christ changed his life forever when he finally gave into Jesus.

Friends, it is the cross of Christ that makes us come face-to-face with who we really are, it is the cross of Christ that puts us all, I mean us all on a level playing field that no matter who you are, where you've been; no matter what your origin or family or race or nationality we are all in the same fix- we are all broken sinful people desperately in need of Jesus.

Listen to the Apostle Paul who put it this way in Philippians 3:7-9, "Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith."

It is only when we really see the message of the cross that we see who we really are- sinful, broken people in need of Jesus- the only one who is our peace. For when we look to the cross we see the Prince of Peace who came riding in on a donkey, the symbol of peace many, many years ago. May the Peace of Christ be with and in you, now and always. Amen.

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Introduction: John Bowring's hymn, *In the Cross of Christ I Glory*- "In the cross of Christ I glory, Towering o'er the wrecks of time..."

So much strife and turmoil in our world, our society...

Don't you ever long for rest from the tensions and strains of life?

How many of us have experienced perfect rest?

My proposition- there is only one answer to our dilemma that can counter, that can deal with the stresses and strains of life and that is **the _____ of Jesus Christ**

Today is Palm Sunday...

The horse-

The donkey-

An example of how the cross of Jesus Christ is the answer- it brought two groups of people together back in Jesus' and Paul's day who traditionally were divided- the _____ and the _____

One main reason for division, for people being unhappy, for wars, ... it would be because of what? _____

Cain was _____ of Abel and _____ is the child of _____

What does _____ look like?

First, **there is the _____ of _____**

Second, **there is the _____ of _____**

Third, **there is the _____ of _____**

Education is the answer...

Conclusion: We are in need of Jesus, the only one who is our peace