

## **“Lessons from the Cross”**

Mark 15:25-37

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### **Communion Devotion**

It was meant to deter crime as much as it was designed to punish criminals. I suppose it worked. Crucifixion was the Roman leaders’ preferred method of capital punishment until the 4<sup>th</sup> Century when Constantine abolished it out of respect for Jesus.

It was not unusual to see someone hanging on a cross as you walked down a Roman road. Often the authorities placed crosses in the most heavily traveled areas so they would be seen.

Cicero, one of Rome’s greatest orators and writers, described crucifixion as the cruelest and most disgusting punishment that could be inflicted upon a human. It was a slow, painful, public, gruesome, humiliating way to die.

This is how Jesus died.

Just so his readers would not miss this important point, Mark repeated it three times in three verses. (Mark 15:24, 25, 27)

Before he was crucified, though, Jesus was mocked, teased, insulted, ridiculed and beaten. Few people have been subjected to more torture in their final hours as Jesus.

My question this morning is this: **What does the crucifixion of Jesus teach us?** What can we learn about ourselves and the world in which we live from the way Jesus died? Let me offer some suggestions for you to consider.

**Selfishness, greed, and the lust for power can bring the worst out in us.** This was certainly true for those responsible for crucifying Jesus.

Jesus died because he offended some of the religious leaders of his day. He exposed their addiction to power, prestige, attention, money and their lavish lifestyles.

He criticized them for using their power and influence for personal gain. He denounced them for making life harder for those who were struggling to survive instead of helping them to rise above their dire circumstances. He called them out for being deceptive and untrustworthy, selfish and greedy, rude and arrogant, insensitive and cruel.

He challenged them to embrace kingdom values and denounce the world's priorities by embracing and pursuing love over hate, serving over being served, sacrifice over self-indulgence, truth over deception, justice over injustice, inclusion over exclusion, generosity over greed, humility over arrogance, forgiveness over revenge, healing over hurting and peace over violence.

He insisted they become passionate about confronting evil, righting wrong, lifting up the lowly, liberating the oppressed, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, comforting the grieving, giving people another chance after making mistakes and building bridges of goodwill, understanding, reconciliation and hope instead of erecting walls of suspicion and hate.

There is no doubt Jesus' words and work created conflict between him and those who chose to control people rather than serve them. Obviously, they were upset with Jesus because he loved the people they did not. He accepted people they excluded. He talked to people they ignored. He healed people they would not touch. He taught people they deemed unworthy of learning. He forgave people they held grudges against. He criticized people they coddled. He gave all he had to help the poor instead of taking all they had to make his life easier.

I think you understand why some of the religious leaders turned on Jesus, as well as Herod and Pilate who were as guilty of these indiscretions as the religious authorities. Jesus threatened them and the power structure that worked to their benefit, and this brought the worst out in them.

The crucifixion reminds us we must always be on guard against the temptation to misuse power and privilege. If we succumb to temptation as many of the leaders around Jesus did, it will bring the worst out in us, too.

What does the crucifixion of Jesus teach us? **It takes a lot of courage to correct injustice.**

Jesus knew he was heading into the eye of a storm when he went to Jerusalem that year to observe Passover with his disciples. He had a bounty on his head, and word would spread quickly of his arrival. He went anyway.

Why? Too much was at stake for Jesus to act cowardly or be silent. Too many people were depending upon him to make his voice heard.

For almost three years, they shared their stories with Jesus as he passed through their towns and villages. Now it was time to speak truth to power by sharing those stories and calling on these leaders to help the people who were struggling to survive.

This was not the time to play it safe or be timid. Jesus' prophetic voice needed to be heard. His vision for a just and peaceful world needed to be articulated. His passion to make hope visible to all people needed to be felt. Jesus knew it, and he looked to God for guidance and courage.

It is now our time to be prophetic. Follow Jesus' example and rely upon God for wisdom, strength and courage.

What does the crucifixion of Jesus teach us? **It takes a lot of love to stay the course.**

I believe Jesus was tempted every day to abandon the mission for which he had been sent. As the resistance to his ministry grew, the challenge to remain faithful to God intensified.

Even in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus had to decide whether to remain and be arrested or to flee in the dark of night to a safer place. He not only chose to stay in the Garden with the disciples but to confront his accusers and to protect the disciples.

Why? His love for God and all the people in this world was stronger than his desire for self-protection.

Only love will motivate us to do the difficult. Love will refuse to quit when the hills get steep and the roads get rough.

“Love never fails,” as Paul wrote to the early Christians in Corinth. I am confident Paul thought about Jesus on the cross when he penned those words. I hope we are inspired by Jesus’ example when we face tough choices.

What does the crucifixion of Jesus teach us? **God will have the final word in our lives, not our enemies.**

Jesus was crucified and buried on Good Friday. I believe I can say with great certainty the religious and secular leaders who orchestrated his death thought this was the last they would see or hear from him. They were in for a big surprise, weren’t they?

On Sunday, the tomb was empty and hope was restored to its rightful place in the hearts of his disciples. The work Jesus began would now continue through the presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of his followers.

God will have the final word in our lives, too, and that word will be a good one. Faithfulness, especially in the midst of adversity, will allow God to help us write more chapters to our life’s story.

The crucifixion of Jesus speaks today in healthy and helpful ways about our own journeys. What lessons does God want you to learn? Ponder this as the bread and cup are passed in a few moments.