

Issues, Etc.

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Lenten Series: Advancing in the Path of Righteousness

Meditation on Luther's *The cross is our theology.*

Text: I Corinthians 2:2-5

Theme: The Cross is Our Theology

By [Steven Hein](#)

Introduction:

Today is Ash Wednesday. It is that day that marks the beginning of the Church's penitential season - a season of preparation for the passion and cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Tonight we begin our preparation for Good Friday and the climax of the saving work of our gracious God - a preparation to receive anew and celebrate the central work and gifts of our salvation.

The traditional lessons for Ash Wednesday focus our attention on our frailty — a frailty that is ours because of our problem of sin. We are living under the curse that God announced after Adam and Eve's Fall — from dust we came forth in life and to dust we shall return. Indeed as we say upon the burial of the remains of loved ones departed; ashes to ashes, dust to dust. The ashes to be placed on our forehead are to remind us that we have a death problem. This is so, not because of the popular explanation of our age, not because death is an essential component of a life cycle of mother nature. Rather physical death of all that has come from the ground is so, because of a curse that God placed on the ground and everything that comes from it in response to our loss and lack of righteousness. Adam and Eve were thrown out of the Garden to live under the curse of death, because they lost and lacked righteousness. There is no life with God without righteousness.

Ash Wednesday reminds us that we, as with our Lord Jesus Christ must travel along a Path of Righteousness that is to be found in the Valley of the Shadow of Death. It is a path that shall take us this Lenten season, not to glory, but to a cross. Are you ready to begin the journey? Are you ready for the ashes? Yes? First, let me invite you to reflect on what this journey means.

Travel along the path of righteousness is rich with paradox. Here is the first one for tonight: The Cross of Christ is not simply our destination in the Path of Righteousness, it is also the character of our Journey. You arrive, by already having been there.

What does this mean? The Cross of Christ is not simply the end of the journey in our quest for righteousness, the cross is not simply the destination of a happy outcome of life with God for us dead sinners - it is also the means by which the journey to that outcome is made and, indeed, the cross is also our experience of the journey itself.

When we come to our destination, the cross of Christ the crucified, there we will behold a death to sin. Our sin. Yet we begin the journey tonight with ashes, reminding us that the curse of death is already with us. And as we journey through this Lenten series along the path of righteousness, it is God's intent to have us die to sin through an examination of our God and our condition through the lens of his penetrating Word. We begin bearing a cross, we walk experiencing the cross, and we end at the foot of the Cross.

In the Path of Righteousness, in the Valley of the Shadow of Death (remember the ashes), Our cross both leads to and embraces the Cross of Christ. This is so because (paradoxically) our cross and the Cross of Christ are one and the same. It was Martin Luther who, when he discovered this truth from his study of the Psalms and the epistles of Paul in late 1517 and early 1518, embarked on a recovery mission of the scriptural Gospel in the Church with the bold assertion that the cross is not simply a part of proper Christian theology, The Cross is our Theology. Here in these words he captured well the words of Paul in I Cor:2; For I am determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

During the summer of 1518, Luther was invited by his superiors in the Augustinian Order to clarify his theological teaching by way of a disputation or debate that would take place in Heidelberg. Luther summarized and set forth the elements of his Cross Theology by way of 28 theses that provide, on the basis of the teaching of Scripture, how sinners under the curse of sin and death may (and may not) advance in the Path of Righteousness. During this Lenten season, you are invited to take this journey through the aid of meditations that will explore six of his most important theses.

Tonight signals the beginning of our journey and the need to get our bearings. Where are we? Where are we going? How will we get there? Take to heart the words of Luther: The Cross is our theology. It is also our journey.

We need to remember that we embark not on a road to glory, but on a crossroad, a cross experience and a cross destination. We make our journey as baptized children of God who have already been united to Christ the crucified in whom we live and serve in His Church. So we begin in and with the cross. On the journey and at our destination we shall meet up with Christ and his cross and thereby find ourselves, our true selves — apart from Him and in Him. We begin our journey reminded of our fundamental frailty, the death problem that reduces us to ashes. On the journey down the valley of the shadow we shall meet and hopefully experience a death to sin, from which we will find again for the first time, righteousness and life. Now and forever.

Our journey through the aid of Luther's Heidelberg Theses, will advance us in the path of righteousness through rich paradoxes which will include: There is life out of death, mercy out of judgment, acceptance out of rejection, justice out of injustice and righteousness out of unrighteousness. For as with the apostle Paul, let it be our resolve in the Church in this place today that we be determined also to know nothing but the Cross — nothing but Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. That our ashes of death might again and again, this Lenten season take us to the cross where we will find and receive life and salvation. Amen.

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