

SERMON FOR LENTEN 2

TEXT: 1 PETER 1: 13-21

THEME: LOVE THAT SPARES NO COST

Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

In the name of Jesus:

You were bought with a price! Not with perishable things, such as silver or gold. You have been bought with a price, the price of Christ's shed blood on Calvary's cross. That is why the main symbol of the Christian faith is the cross, because the cross is central to our faith. It could have been the symbol of a fish, two simple curved lines intersecting to form a head and a tail.

The symbol of the fish was a visual reminder that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and our Savior. The symbol is based on the spelling of the Greek word for fish, which was an acronym that meant "Jesus Christ is the Son of God and

our Savior. “ So the fish is a nice symbol, a good symbol. But there are other symbols we could use as well.

How about the symbol of an empty tomb? I don’t know how that would work out. How would you be able to draw an open cave? How could you develop jewelry to wear around your neck? An empty tomb would be difficult. And maybe that is the reason why it wasn’t used, because you could not draw it in a simple way. But for a faith that rejoices in the resurrection of Jesus and looks forward to the life to come, it would be a really great symbol.

Instead, we have the symbol of the cross. Have you ever thought about how strange that is? The cross was a Roman instrument of public torture and execution. When we wear a cross around our neck, it’s like decorating ourselves with a shiny little image of an electric chair. When churches hang a huge cross on the front wall of their church, it’s like displaying a gallows or a hangman’s noose. When architects design a church steeple with a cross at the top, it’s like lifting up before all the world a guillotine. So why do we Christians keep this symbol, this executioner’s cross, so prominent among us? Well, for one thing, that is where Jesus accomplished our salvation. That’s where, by his blood and death, he won for us the forgiveness of all our sins, and he made peace between God and man. But another reason why the cross is such a precious symbol to Christians is that, in the cross of Jesus, we see

most clearly just how much our God loves us. The cross, like no other symbol, should cry out to us every time we see it: Behold how much God loves you!

It's been many years now since Mel Gibson produced the movie *The Passion of the Christ*. It was a movie focusing on the last week of Jesus's life, and especially his trial and crucifixion. Gibson's film was intensely violent and graphic and bloody. Many Christians who saw the film, although they may have found it hard to watch, found it to be a powerful display of just how much Jesus loves us— that he would endure for us such hatred and scorn and abuse and pain.

How large is God's love for you? How can you measure how much he values you? Well, one way to understand that is to ask what he would pay to have you? What would he be willing to give for your good, for your welfare and safety? How much do you value a good cup of coffee? Enough to pay four or five dollars? How much do you value your dog or cat? Enough to pay for all of the food and grooming and medicines and check-ups? How much do you value having the latest phone? Enough to pay . . . whatever it is that they're asking these days? To some extent, the cost you are willing to pay for something shows how much you value it. At the cross of Jesus, a price was paid; there was a cost that cannot begin to be measured in money. At the cross, we were ransomed, we were purchased, and obtained for God, "not

with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ.” A staggering cost. A staggering love.

The Bible marvels at this staggering cost from two perspectives, that of the Father and that of the Son. The first perspective is that of God the Father offering up his only, beloved Son for sinners. When the Bible speaks of Jesus as God’s only Son and as God’s beloved Son, it evokes reminds us of the story of Abraham and the near-sacrifice of Isaac. “Abraham! Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you,” God commanded [Gn 22:1–2]. Can you imagine?

In the end, God sent his angel to stop Abraham, knife in hand, and God instead provided a ram for the sacrifice. In the fullness of time, God would again provide a sacrifice, a more perfect sacrifice, a sacrifice for the sin of all humanity: not Isaac, but Jesus, God’s only and beloved Son from all eternity, now in human flesh. This time, no animal would appear in a thicket to spare the Son—and the Father!—this cost. The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world is not a lamb, but a Son. The Son of God in human flesh who was tortured and abandoned for your sins and mine. God the Father paid such a price so that you would be certain that He loves you. Just as Paul writes: “If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but

gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" [Rom 8:31-32]

But there is another perspective, the perspective of Jesus, who goes willingly to the cross. "I lay down my life for the sheep," Jesus explained. "No one takes it from me, I lay it down of my own accord" [Jn 10:15, 18]. Jesus was determined, he was resolute, in walking his path toward the cross, even though he knew that the cost would be dreadful. He was bound and determined to go to Jerusalem, to be handed over to be tried and crucified. And when that moment came, Jesus said: "Now my soul is troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour?' But for this purpose I have come to this hour!" [Jn 12:27]. In Gethsemane the cost was so unthinkable that Jesus sweated drops of blood while he prayed. Jesus could have summoned twelve legions of angels to rescue Him. But He didn't. He willingly went to the cross to die, FOR YOU.

In the garden, Jesus had prayed, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will" [Mt 26:39]. If it had been possible, if there were some other way, if there were some lesser cost, some lesser price that would have restored us, would the Father have denied the Son's prayer? But our sin is so wicked, such an offense against God and

against one another, that it required the blood of the only, beloved Son of God.

A cost that He has willingly paid.

“He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death, that I may be his own and live under him in his kingdom and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.” The cross is the most cherished symbol of our faith, because it reminds us of just how much our God loves us.

Amen.