

Holy Cross Day – 2021
Numbers 21:4-9
1 Corinthians 1:18-25
John 12:20-33

It was a fad. Short-lived in my Junior High School, Memorial Jr. High, but it certainly gained an ardent set of followers. Fads in the '70's were abundant. Bell-bottom jeans, feathered hair (ala Farrah Fawcett – didn't matter if you were a girl or a boy), pet rocks, mood rings, and puka shells. In junior high we had that origami thing where you pick a number and move this paper box gizmo back and forth and then you open a flap in the paper to tell you your fortune. Fads; the 1970's they were a fad factory.

For two or three weeks, when I was an eighth grader, all the girls starting talking backwards. I was mystified. "No" became "on" or "own" if they did it phonetically, I can't remember. But I do remember being mystified and them having complete conversations... backwards. One day they came to school with their clothes on backwards, everything except their shoes.

God loves backwards. It's not a fad. God loves backwards because He loves you. He reveals Himself to you, as He truly is, backwards. He's not particularly interested in coming in through the front door. Moses wanted a front door experience. He begged. Few are the people who have had as high a standing with God as did Moses. Let me see Your glory. It's a totally reasonable request. **The radiance, the beauty, the overwhelming majesty of God's divine essence – Moses wanted to see it, to have it invade his eyes, his heart, his soul.** "Please show me your glory" (Exodus 33:18). God gives you a lesson. What God did next with Moses is a lesson for this day, a lesson for your faith. "You cannot see my face and live." The raw glory of God would be our undoing, so fouled are we with sin, so corrupt, so fallen. God tucked Moses into a cleft of the rock and then paraded His glory before Moses. "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will **proclaim before you my name 'The Lord'**" (Exodus 33:19). The Almighty covered Moses with His hand until He had passed by, then God took His hand away and Moses saw. God loved Moses and gave him a priceless revelation. What did Moses see? Moses saw God's back.

There is one thing that you need to understand about yourself, about your fellow man. Your natural conception of God is highly confused and unreliable. Sinful man, when he conjures up in his head an idea of what God is about, what He's like, what His agenda is, sinful man gets all that massively wrong; sinful man can't possibly get it right. You've heard that a blind squirrel occasionally finds a nut? Natural man would never find God, never come close to understanding Him, would inevitably construct something that is entirely contrary to who God genuinely is. Do you know who knows that? God knows it. God doesn't play theology by fallen man's rules. But remember, He loves you. God *wants* to reveal Himself to you. So, He hides. God is good at hiding. God hides Himself so that you might find Him. God wants to be known. God wants to be known as He truly is... so He conceals Himself. And only in this concealment does He become visible; only in concealment does He become truly known. You can't hide something more deeply than to conceal it under its opposite. Faith and faith alone sees what is hidden.

Do you know how beautiful your faith is? Do you know how wondrous and sublime and mysterious and enlivening your faith is? God has revealed Himself to you in the most remarkable way and you have seen it, you have received this revelation and embraced it, acknowledging as the highest truth the most paradoxical reality. Do you know what your faith sees? Your faith sees that the glory of God is inextricably intertwined with the most shameful event this planet has ever known. Jesus hung on a cross, full of wretched poverty, suffering as a criminal, vile and despised and people couldn't even look at Him. That is God showing you who He is. That is the only way to know who God truly is. Pontius Pilate, as Jesus stood in front of him, was incredulous. "**You** are the king of the Jews?" Christ's kingship was hidden, cloaked to the human eye, revealed only to faith. God reveals His power in weakness, reveals His glory in radical shame, reveals His righteousness as He is condemned. The hidden God is the crucified God. There, on the cross, God becomes most visible precisely as He is. God is unrecognizable to unbelief as He suffers, bleeding, dying. You have come to know Him best there, hidden but found. What do you see? Mercy, love, forgiveness, ability, determination, humility, grace... all for you; all to save you!

Imagine knowing what you know and being at Christ's crucifixion. Your heart would be breaking AND your heart would be full. Christ crucified, that is your God. As He dies, His unending glory invading your eyes, your mind, your heart. Moses: "*Please show me your glory.*" There it is; on the cross, hidden so that you might find it. Not by way of the world's wisdom do you find it. God rejects the world's values and elevates what the world despises.

That is never ever going to change. Unbelief (at its core) is never ever going to change. The eye of sinful man (at its core) is never ever going to change. Thanks be to God, you *do* see. It is totally by grace; the eyes of your heart *do* see. Were you to be there, at Calvary, transported miraculously to see with your eyeballs the death of God on a tree, you wouldn't be able to perceive what was going on by sight, but by faith. You *do* see it; now. God has opened the eyes of your heart to see what is hidden. About you, His little children, Jesus said this: "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will" (Matthew 11:25-26).

Your sin, my sin, is that we want some of the world's pride, the world's glamour, the world's "bigger, better, faster" religion. Somehow, we want to work it out that the first should be first, and the first is always me. Somehow, we want to work it out that just once Jesus shows those so-and-sos who's Boss (capital B). We grow tired of God's foolishness and gravitate to man's wisdom. Do you know everything of Christ's cross that is there to be learned/found/discovered? Are you seeking to know it, to fill you mind with it? St. Paul said that he considered most everything else that was to his credit as rubbish compared to knowing Christ and His suffering (Philippians 3:5-11). Is that you or is the world and your sinful flesh keeping you from seeking the glory of God where He has hidden it because you don't particularly like looking in those kinds of places?

God speaks backwards and you understand. The first shall be last: Christ, the firstborn of the Father, was last as He served you with His precious death and burial. The last shall be first: The One who became last on the Holy Cross for us all is the firstborn from the dead, risen with

healing in His wings. God speaks backwards and the world is mystified, dumbfounded, but you hear His Word through the organ of faith. God's Word runs contrary to the wisdom of the world; that is why they call it folly. "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (2 Corinthians 2:14). God hides Himself in the Word, in the preaching of Christ and Him crucified. You hear it and your heart is enlivened. The Holy Spirit is hidden in this Word and He reveals the Son, the Son reveals the Father and people who couldn't make sense of Christ's cross, to whom that sacrifice was incomprehensible, they begin to see. That's the church's mission. Christ's kingdom is hidden in this Word, hidden but very present. Christ's church is hidden beneath His cross. Christ's body is hidden beneath bread. Christ's blood is hidden beneath wine. Christ's righteousness, His resurrection, and His heaven are all hidden beneath this Divine Service. We see it and we celebrate it and we point to it as the very present salvation of God. With the Lord Christ we say this: "Father, glorify your name" (John 12:28).