2012_03_04 (Passion 2) Sermon – Ascension Batavia SDG

Grace and peace to you. All Scripture is God breathed, and is profitable for our instruction in righteousness, that the people of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Mark 8:27-38 (NKJV) - 27 Now Jesus and His disciples went out to the towns of Caesarea Philippi; and on the road He asked His disciples, saying to them, "Who do men say that I am?" 28 So they answered, "John the Baptist; but some say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets." 29 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ." 30 Then He strictly warned them that they should tell no one about Him. 31 And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32 He spoke this word openly. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. 33 But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, "Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men." 34 When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 35 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. 36 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? 37 Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? 38 For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

"CROSS BEARERS - SATAN BEHIND, FOCUSED BEYOND"

In Jesus Name, who bore the cross of sin for us, dear fellow cross bearers.

In Colossians chapter 3, Paul writes, Colossians 3:1–3 — 1 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. Focused beyond . . . there in lies the believer's life, the believer's perspective, the believer's whole existence and purpose. "...faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). Focused beyond. "we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). Let us leave Satan behind, and look beyond, today, as we consider firstly the cross laid on our Savior, and secondly, the cross laid on your shoulders. May the Spirit bless our study.

1. Jesus bears His cross, focused beyond

How many times did Jesus remind His disciples of the impending end of His earthly ministry? How many times did the prophets predict this fact? Jesus was focused beyond. As He battled Satan in our place, facing temptation after temptation to abandon His cross. Yet, He remained focused, steady, sure.

<u>v.31</u> – Notice the word "must." Sometimes this is translated, "It is necessary..." It is kind of ironic that in Greek the word is pronounced "die." Similarly on many other occasions Jesus used this word to emphasize His mission...

When Peter, in the Garden of Gethsemene, drew out his sword to defend His Lord from being taken captive, Jesus responds... Matthew 26:54 — 54 How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?" When Jesus appeared in His resurrected body to His disciples on the road to Emmaus, still they did not understand. They acted as if this was something unexpected, as if they had lost their Christ . . . Jesus says to them, Luke 24:25–26 — "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 <u>Ought not</u> the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory (was it not necessary)?"

Jesus knew full well what the prophets had written. He remembered prophecies such as Psalm 16:9–10 — 9 Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will rest in hope. 10 For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. He knew full well what must happen. He knew what was necessary. Jesus was focused on the cross He must bear. Jesus was focused beyond.

He must bear it for you. No man has truly suffered as our Lord did. No man has faced the cross our Lord had to bear. For Isaiah describes Jesus "bearing our griefs" ... "carrying our sorrows" ... "wounded for our transgressions" (Isaiah 53:4,5). We do indeed suffer in this sin cursed world, but our Lord suffered beyond just the curse of this world. He suffered the curse of death. In the Garden of Gethsemene, we read that Jesus was sorrowful unto death. He pleaded with His Father that this wretched cup would pass from Him. And yet in all this He still knew it was necessary. He still remained focused beyond.

<u>v.32,33</u> – In John 8:44 Jesus refers to Satan as the "father of lies." "... he speaks from his own resources." Peter told Jesus that this suffering and death did not need to happen, indeed, that such things would never happen to the one he has just called Christ, the King, the Son of God" – for Peter to say this to Jesus was a lie of Satan. Satan was tempting Jesus to abandon His cross, to return to His rightful throne and glory in heaven. Satan was quite focused – but never on the things of God.

As it says in v.30, Jesus strictly warned His disciples not to tell anyone that He is the Christ. Seems strange doesn't it. Elsewhere Jesus adds that they are not to do this until He has risen from the dead. Jesus was focused beyond. He knew the cross that awaited Him. He knew the more His earthly fame spread, the more Satan would use this against Him. He did not want to be exulted as an earthly king. Being mindful of the things of God, He knew what road He must travel for our sins.

Consider the times we are confronted with a choice . . . a fork in the road. On one path lies the things of God – His will and His Word; on the other side lies the things of men – easy street, sins against God's word. How many times do we choose the path that will

be easier? How many times do we at least want to? Our flesh will rest much more happily at ease if we would just let ourself erupt in anger, if we would just ignore that person we have wronged, if we would just compromise a little on God's word, if we would just rest satisfied that there is just not enough time for Jesus right now. Our flesh is focused on the things of men – why there is just not enough time for Jesus right now.

<u>v.36,37</u>. Yet it is just because of these sins of the flesh that "the Son of Man must suffer many things ... be killed, and after three days rise again" (v.31). Jesus was focused not just to the cross and the suffering, but to the resurrection and the joy beyond. Beyond the cross He saw you. He sees you with Him in eternity. We considered this in our gradual for today which comes from Hebrews 12 – **Hebrews 12:2–3 – 2 ... Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. The joy that was set before Him was you. As He suffered many things, as He was rejected, He was focused on you. As He carried the greatest of all crosses which held upon it your sins, from the largest to the least, He saw you. He saw the joy that was set before Him as He rejected Satan's "easy street," and was focused beyond.**

So now our Jesus gathers with us, in joy, as we share this forgiveness of sins with each other. He right now is with us, mindful of the things of God. He is in His Word and His Sacrament. He rejoices as I tell you: "Your sins are forgiven." He is among us in bread and wine giving us His body and blood, the forgiveness of sins. The wrong paths we have chosen throughout our life are erased, and the Father only sees the path and focus our Savior traveled as He set Satan behind Himself and focused His gaze to the cross. Jesus bears His cross, focused beyond.

2. We bear our cross, focused beyond

This takes us now to you. This takes us to the cross that is laid on your shoulders. Here enters the Holy Spirit, giving to us that same focus that our Lord had. Now enters the all important work of God's gospel, strengthening you as you feel that weight upon you. Now we find that great need for God's Word and Sacrament as we, ourselves, are challenged by Satan. He pulls you aside as Peter did and whispers: "Not you..." "not fair..." "couldn't you just..." "it would be easier..." "God doesn't love you..." Let usleave Satan behind. Let us be focused beyond.

As in Jesus' life, Satan often uses other people, who might even think they are serving a good purpose, to try to get you focused on the things of men. He uses a subtle lure, an attractive word or sight, a relieving thought planted in your head to make you forget the things of God.

<u>v.34,35</u> – As with Jesus the tribulation we face is necessary. As Jesus said "the Son of Man must suffer..." so also we must suffer. The Scriptures affirm this. For us not to suffer or to feel the weight of this world would mean either 1) we are no longer in this world, we are in heaven, or 2) we are no longer mindful of the things of God and have lost to worldly comfort so that we never want to leave this place.

Jesus said, John 16:33 — 33 These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

Our focus is a faith focus. Are you afraid of heights? Maybe you remember back to the first time your parents let go of the bicycle and you were riding on your own. If you look down, you are likely to fall, lose you balance, or run into something. No, you keep your eyes ahead. You stay focused beyond. For beyond we see Christ, who has overcome the world. Beyond we see the joy that awaits us, just as Jesus did. We see the obstacles and Jesus leads us around, over, under, and sometimes even right through them.

In our New Testament reading today, in Romans 5, we read, (5:3) – we rejoice in our sufferings. Rejoice? What rejoicing? How can someone who has been stricken with cancer have any reason to rejoice? How can someone who faces family problems or financial problems rejoice? How can someone who is being picked on at school or treated unfairly at home rejoice? As Romans chapter 5 goes on ... tribulation and suffering produces hope. Why would we hope for anything if there was nothing wrong with this world? And this is not a hope like the world hopes. This is not "I hope you get better..." or "I hope the stock market turns around..." or "I hope something bad doesn't happen..." This is the hope of the gospel which is more sure than anything this world has ever known. Romans 5:8–9 — 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.

This is why you can rejoice in tribulation – you are saved from wrath. You have been declared righteous and spotless by His blood. These are the things of God. This focus beyond sees Jesus.

This is what leads you to, v.34, "deny" yourself. This is what leads us to \underline{de} -tach from things that fade and perish, things that disappoint; and be \underline{a} -ttached to things that last forever, things that never disappoint. $\underline{v.35b}$.

Our glory is still hidden even as it was also for Jesus. We walk the path of our Savior just like Simon of Cyrene. Just visiting Jerusalem from Africa for the Feast, little did he know that he would be chosen to bear the cross of Christ up the hill of Jerusalem to Mt. Calvary where our Lord was crucified. Perhaps you too are yanked out of the crowd, unexpectedly. And with every step you become less and less mindful of all those petty things of the world which you used to worry about. With every step you are more and more mindful of the things of God, of things that are truly important – our Father, our faith, and our family.

"Who do men say that I am?" The world has lots of different ideas of who Jesus is. So Jesus asks, "But who do you say that I am?" As bearers of the cross, our life becomes an answer to this question. Where we turn for help in bearing our cross answers this

question. Our hope in the midst of sorrow answers this question. "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Savior who has borne the cross of sin for us."

Yes, we are anything but ashamed of this Son of Man or of His words. We join the holy angels in boasting: Romans 1:16–17 — 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

Back to the initial passage from Colossians with which we began: Colossians 3:1–4 — 1 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

We leave Satan behind as we gaze into heaven – to that glory that awaits us. We see there the joys of heaven that will never end. Fellow cross-bearers take heart. You too will appear with Him in glory.

Amen.