



For these next few weeks, we will take time to consider a hymn that has been part of our standard Lutheran repertoire dating all the way back to our original red hymnal from 1958. And even ever since its original writing in Scotland, our grandparents and parents and children of God long before that, have boldly sung “Beneath the Cross of Jesus” during the season of Lent, as a way to remind all of us of what lies ahead. But, not just that, but of the cross that boldly stands in the depths of our soul every day, even during the times when we’re not so sure we are

worthy of it at all.

Now, at the church building where my grandparents and parents and us children trekked for our fair share of Sunday mornings and Lenten Wednesday evenings, oddly enough in that sanctuary, there were two rather prominent crosses. Up front, on the altar, in the center, was this seemingly gold-plated cross, as if to convey the glorious victory won over sin and death. And perhaps its pristine appearance was also to boldly emphasize that no one should even think about getting too close to it: for that was only for the esteemed pastor, and maybe a select few on the professional altar guild, who then had to wear the cleanest protective gloves before dare touching that cross.

Now, for the longest time, I never noticed the other cross. Because, we were the good Lutherans who sat in the way back of the sanctuary underneath the balcony. Except, for some reason beyond explanation, for one of the few instances in the entire history of the Lutheran church, we moved from those pews in the way back to the middle of the front set. And then, I started to be almost transfixed by this seemingly massive crucifix hanging above the balcony. I never got to know the whole story behind it. But, to be honest, it was rather intimidating at first. It was almost as if Jesus was looking down on all the pew occupiers on the Sunday mornings and Lenten Wednesday evenings in sadness and despair and pain. And I couldn’t help but wonder from a few things said from pulpits and sung from hymnals inside the sanctuary and discussed in surrounding classrooms; I couldn’t help but wonder if we were the reason that that happened to him? Am I the reason that he had to suffer on that cross?

For the longest time, I did not want to be beneath that cross of Jesus. I had no interest whatsoever in taking a stand for that understanding of God. But I suppose that’s why that other cross was in there, too: as if to convey that nothing could stop him from coming off that cross and down into the very depths of our souls, to even further reveal the holy encapsulation of love and compassion and joy as described in Philippians. Yes, that other cross hanging above us was a needed reminder of what happened on Calvary, to be sure, but God never desired to draw us beneath a cross of guilt and shame and intimidation and fear; for the world provides more than its fair share of all of that already.

No, we are beneath a cross of the utmost encouragement: to be set free from sin and death out into the world with grace; a cross that also stands within us to remind us that no level of fear stands a chance against all the love and compassion and joy that is alive and well with the Christ who continues to walk among us. I will gladly take a stand and confess that kind of God to a humanity that continues to yearn for hope, for the God who insists that we are all more than worthy of what Jesus did for us on that very cross. Not to shame us, not to make us feel guilty, but to convince us just how much love will always win the day, not just on Good Friday, not just

three days after that, but still now and for all eternity. All made possible because of the One who took a stand for us in the face of sin and death, and will never ever back down for any of us. And for that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!