

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
Des Moines, WA  
April 8, 2012 – Easter Sunrise**

**Acts 2:12-22**

**Jesus' Cross Is Our Symbol of... Life?**

**Yes, because:**

- 1. It shows how God undoes evil**
- 2. It reveals amazing blessings**

**Hymns: 159 – 163 – 156 – 166 – 160**

All Scripture quotations from the NIV 1984

***<sup>22</sup> “Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. <sup>23</sup> This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. <sup>24</sup> But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.***

***<sup>25</sup> David said about him: “I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. <sup>26</sup> Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, <sup>27</sup> because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. <sup>28</sup> You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.”***

***<sup>29</sup> “Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. <sup>30</sup> But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. <sup>31</sup> Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. <sup>32</sup> God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.***

Do you know what a “paradox” is?  
A paradox is an English term for a statement that seems to be a contradiction. For example, a person might say, “Nobody eats at that restaurant because it’s always so crowded.” That seems to be a contradictory statement, but... you know what they mean.

Or consider the term “sophomore.” (My midweek Lenten sermon talked about the two Greek words SOPHIA [“wisdom”] and MOROS [“fool”] ) Our English word “sophomore” puts those two words together to make a “wise fool,” meaning that a person that age is blossoming in wisdom yet might mistakenly think that they know it all.

This Easter morning we focus on a paradox presented to us in Acts 2. The paradox has to do with the cross, which is now draped in white here in our sanctuary. If you would ask the average person what the cross symbolizes, the first natural reaction is that it symbolizes death. The cross was an instrument intended to kill. That was its purpose. It is the place where Jesus himself died. Yet Acts 2 introduces a paradox as Peter preached a sermon on Pentecost Day to the crowds in Jerusalem. He told them that Jesus’ cross did not end in death at all. Let’s see three reasons in Peter’s words why this is so, and why it introduces a blessed and joyful paradox to us!

## **1. It shows how God undoes evil**

We read in vv. 22-24: *“Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.”*

Did you get the sense of how God worked to undo evil in the wickedness of Jesus’ crucifixion? This is not a novel concept. Since sinful mankind had already had centuries of

sinful history, we can see how God worked to do this many times before Jesus ever lived on this earth. Can you think of some?

- The Tower of Babel – When mankind had the idea after the flood that they should defy God’s command to fill the earth and wanted to build a tower to their glory, God undid their plan by confusing their languages.
- Jonah’s flight – When Jonah ran away from the Lord instead of going to preach at Nineveh, the Lord sent a storm on the sea that created havoc until Jonah was thrown overboard and swallowed by a fish.
- Jericho – They were well known for their thick, strong walls (and also for their idolatry). God made short work of their thick, strong walls.
- Haman and Esther – When Haman, the enemy of God’s people, built an 80-foot gallows for the Jew Mordecai and planned an extermination of the Jewish race, the Lord through Esther revealed his plot and Haman himself was hung on his gallows.
- And many more!

Also, in unique ways, God not only undid evil works, but he also turned them into good, to work for his purposes. A good example of this is Joseph in Egypt. When his brothers sold him as a slave because they hated him, God worked to save many people of the world from the famine that was coming, and also made Israel a great nation in the fertile country of Egypt.

How do we see this concept in action with the cross? We certainly see wicked plans and actions that were being carried out at the time Jesus was crucified. Peter recounts to the crowds how Jesus was full of goodness. He did many miracles, wonders, and signs. He healed people and raised them from the dead. He preached God’s Word. In fact, those acts of his were an accreditation from God the Father that he was God’s Son!

Yet wicked plots and actions followed. Jesus’ enemies hated him, plotted against him, and had him crucified. Peter stresses the wickedness of their actions in some vivid words. Our account says that they had “put him to death.” Literally, that’s a vivid word that means “to do away with.” Peter continues that they did this by “nailing him to the cross.” The Greek says “by fastening him.” **When Jesus came, doing all the good that he did, they “did away with him by fastening him!”**

However, God showed them who was in charge. *“But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.”* It’s interesting that the word Peter used for “freeing” is the word “to loosen.” They had “fastened” Jesus, but God responded by “loosening” him. God raised him from the dead!

This freed Jesus from the “pangs of death.” That word is the term for “birth pains.” When the contractions start, you know what that will lead to, and you cannot prevent the inevitable. Sooner or later, that will undoubtedly lead to BIRTH. There is no holding it back. In the same way, there would be no holding back what God would do. **Jesus would certainly rise from the dead, for God would undo their wicked works!**

This fact is of great comfort to us. Do you ever get frustrated by “wicked works” around you in the world? Perhaps there are wicked things that you don’t have any control over, but go on around you and even affect you personally.

At times like that, we can remember that in his time God undoes evil. A verse that some of you might remember from your Catechism days is Galatians 6:7: *“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.”* The judgment of God may not happen soon. In fact, perhaps we never see it come to completion. The children of Israel lived in Egypt for over 400 years. Many of them would not see God’s great acts of delivering their race from Pharaoh. But it would happen. And in his time, God will undo all evil.

## It reveals amazing blessings

We see another way the cross is a paradox of death and life this morning. Peter's sermon continued: *"David said about him: 'I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence'... Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay."*

Peter makes it clear that when David said these words 1000 years before Jesus lived, they applied directly to the Messiah who would come. They serve as his prayer to God the Father as the cross approached him.

In a very fitting way, they also become David's prayer and our prayer too. God will give the same amazing blessings to us. We see some remarkable blessings that David speaks about, which result from the cross of Jesus:

1. Joy – We have joy in what the cross brings, because in it God undoes our evil. After all, this isn't only about other people's wickedness, is it? Did you "fasten" Jesus? Did you nail him there? In one of our well known Lenten hymns, "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded," we sing:

**My burden in your passion,  
Lord, You have borne for me,  
For it was my transgression,  
My shame, on Calvary.  
I cast me down before you,  
Wrath is my rightful lot.  
Have mercy, I implore you;  
Redeemer, spurn me not!**

You did fasten him there. Your evil, wickedness, and sin caused him to suffer and die.

Yet we have inner joy in that cross because we know it leads to Easter morning and to our forgiveness that we are assured of today. **Christ died for us and rose for us. And we have salvation because of him!**

2. Not being "shaken" – The Messiah knew he did not need to be shaken in his mission, and this is our prayer and our blessing today also. The word "to shake" here is used of the tossing sea or an earthquake. Are there days you feel fear and doubt like that? Are you weak? Do you lack faith and confidence?

If so, remember these words and realize you do not need to fear being "shaken!" We can say along with Psalm 46: *"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress..."*

3. Hope and resurrection – On this Easter morning, we can also look forward to our grave – If Judgment Day doesn't come first – will result in the same ending as the Messiah's. We have hope in our future because of our own resurrection: *"My body also will live in hope, because you will not abandon me to the grave..."* **We will rise, for on the Last Day Jesus' voice will summon us from the tomb!**
4. Psalm 16, which Peter quotes, says, *"You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand."* After we have been raised from death, we will go to the place of eternal joy and pleasure that Jesus has

prepared for us. **We will go to heaven!**  
**What joy will be ours forever because**  
**of this Easter morning!**

As we close our look at Acts 2 today,  
what is the cross? Is it a symbol of death, or a  
symbol of life?

As we have seen, it is a paradox. It is  
surely both. It is the instrument of death that  
took Jesus' life. Yet it does not end there, but  
ends with the hand of God undoing wicked  
plots and bringing us amazing blessings.

Because the blessings of life  
overshadow the stench of death in the cross,  
many of our Lutheran churches use empty  
crosses more than ones with Jesus' figure on it  
(a crucifix). It certainly is not wrong to use one  
over the other, but there is high symbolism in  
the empty cross. Christ is not there. His work  
there is done. And that accomplished fact  
emphasizes the end of the story, the blessings  
of life.

May this paradox strengthen our faith  
this morning. And may we live with this  
amazing hope and confident joy all our life!  
Amen.