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Good Friday

“How Big Is The Cross?”

John 20:17-18

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You know how pastors and vicars make the sign of the cross when leading worship? During the Invocation (“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit ...”); in the absolution; consecrating communion; and, at the very end, during the Benediction.

Every pastor has his own style. I reach out a little bit, and go 2-1/2 fingers nice and slow. Pastor Lew likes to make a big cross, open palm, at high speed. Vicar Kevin does the lefty cross, with a kind of a swoop at the beginning.

I’ve had the pleasure to worship a few times in recent months with a pastor in Puerto Rico. Gustavo Maita is a Lutheran missionary who grew up in Venezuela. When he makes the sign of the cross, it’s something like this. Super-fast, super-smooth, super-small. Gustavo has a unique style all his own; but it’s the smallest cross I’ve ever seen made by a pastor.

How big is the cross supposed to be, when a pastor waves his hand at you? Does it matter? Of course not.

Last weekend I saw many of you folding palm branches into crosses. Most of them were about this size. But one of the kids in our church handed this one to me on the way out last Sunday, a tiny little palm cross.

The crosses that hang on our church wall, or in our homes, or around our necks -- all of these are just symbolic crosses, aren’t they? So “how big” doesn’t really matter. Our crosses are only symbols of the actual event we’re remembering tonight. These crosses symbolize for believers the suffering

Jesus endured for us, the sacrifice God's Son made for our sins by giving his life on the Good Friday cross.

I read to you about that cross a moment ago. "Jesus went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull ... There they crucified him" (John 20:17-8).

I've often pictured Jesus dragging that cross toward Calvary, that heavy, brutal instrument of his own death. How big was the cross Jesus carried? The cross on which his hands and feet were nailed? The cross on which he was ridiculed and tortured by men? The cross on which our Lord was rejected and abandoned by his Father in heaven?

Scripture doesn't record its dimensions. Many ancient Christian churches claim to have fragments of the True Cross, including one which was rescued from the awful fire at the Notre Dame cathedral this week. But no one knows for sure if those are genuine, nor how big the real cross of Jesus actually was.

So how big is the cross? In a physical sense, it doesn't matter at all. In a spiritual sense, though, it makes all the difference in the world. When it comes to your salvation – when it comes to you and me being certain that we are truly forgiven by God of all our sins, and saved for all eternity – well, then this question is absolutely critical, and of fundamental importance for us, on this Good Friday.

How big is the cross? It's vital that every one of us knows the answer. And here it is. In a spiritual sense, what Jesus our Savior did on the cross is big enough to save you. Big enough to save the world, and big enough to save you. What Jesus Christ did on the cross is big enough to forgive every sin, big enough to satisfy every demand of God's Law, big enough to make righteous every sinner who has faith in Jesus.

The cross on our Hope logo, printed there in your bulletin, has open arms. It's a reminder for us that the cross is for all people. That the love Jesus showed on Good Friday is big enough for every person in our community, and in our world.

And big enough for you. Make sure you take this message personally tonight. Christ's work on the cross was for you. And that cross-work of Christ was big enough to complete your salvation. His cross-sacrifice paid the penalty for all your transgressions, for every single instance of your disobedience.

From the cross, Jesus said, "It is finished." Not "It's almost finished, and you do the rest." Not "My part is finished, and now you do your part." "It is finished." Christ's sacrifice was totally sufficient, was all-availing. Christ's Good Friday work for you, for me, for the whole world of sinners, was big enough to satisfy God, big enough to save you.

Why is this so important? Why is it so imperative that every one of us knows tonight how big the cross is, when it comes to our salvation? Because it's real easy for us to think that somehow it's still up to us.

"I'm trying to get right with God," people will say. "I've got to do my acts of obedience. I have to be more faithful, so I can be sure I'm saved." God certainly wants us to be obedient, and to grow in faith. But that's not what saves us. Only Jesus does that. And the cross is big enough to save you!

Others will say, "Look, I know I'm not perfect, but I've done the best I could. I've lived a pretty good life. I'm sure God understands."

As if our perfect, holy God accepts our paltry, sin-filled efforts. As if women and men like us have to somehow achieve our own reconciliation with God, in whole or in part. As if somehow Christ's work on the cross was deficient, and we fill in the gaps.

Don't let any preacher or teacher, don't let any Bible study that you read online, don't let any church that you visit convince you that you need to make a contribution to what Jesus did to save you.

We can't fill in any gaps! And thank God we don't have to! Know tonight, in your heart and soul, that Jesus finished your salvation on the cross. Trust in his work. Be confident in his sacrifice. Rely fully on his love, on his grace, tonight and always, for your salvation. Because the cross is big enough to save you!

But what about our Christian living in this world? The Lent season is over, but we're still facing temptation, aren't we? Christ died to forgive our sins, but we're still fighting sin's hold on us. We still need to humble ourselves before God, to plead for daily mercy, to listen to the Word, love God's people, serve the needy, obey God's Law, hallow his name, keep the Lord's day holy, raise our kids in the faith, and so much more. We do such good deeds not to save ourselves, but because the saving love of Jesus, best shown on the cross, inspires us, strengthens us, and moves us to live for him.

But when it comes to our salvation, you know the answer, right? We gather tonight in the shadow of the cross. The big, big, big enough cross of Jesus. Amen.