

Cross, Tomb, Table
Sunday April 21, 2024

As I was thinking back over the Lenten and Easter season, I started realizing that we have been talking about 3 basic things. We have been talking about the Cross, the Table, and the Tomb—specifically the empty tomb. It also occurred to me that these three things, Cross, Tomb and Table, are the best symbols there are to represent who we are as followers of Christ, and that really we maybe needed to put an equal emphasis on all 3. The cross usually gets center stage, as well it should, and it is easy to use that as a symbol—its easy to wear a cross around your neck! Not so much a tomb or a table. But as we leave this Easter season to go into Pentecost in a few weeks, I thought it appropriate to consider all 3 for a moment. Then, I noticed this photo of an empty tomb on the shelf in the library downstairs, which seemed a confirmation that we should talk about these three things. Therefore you see before you today the cross, the Tomb and the Table. Let's dig in.

The Cross—The reason for the use of the cross as a Christian symbol is obvious—Jesus died on a cross to save us from our sins, but there are lots of shapes and shades of meaning with this symbol. Though there are as many as 40 different cross shapes, there are 4 main shapes used in Christian theology to represent the cross.

GREEK CROSS

The Greek cross is one where the two pieces of the cross meet in the middle—a plus sign if you will. The Greek Cross is said to symbolize God himself. The cross pieces are said to symbolize life and light which are a sign of Christ as, only through him can a person find pure light and eternal life.

LATIN CROSS

This is the shape of the cross that we traditionally think of as the cross of the crucifixion. If the cross has Jesus' body still on it, it is called a crucifix.

TAU CROSS

This cross is also called St. Anthony's cross. It is shaped like the capital letter T. Many scholars believe that this cross might have been the actual shape of the one used to crucify Jesus and the thieves on Golgotha so many years ago.

Another type of cross we should consider as Presbyterians is the Celtic cross, as you see at the front of the Sanctuary. This cross comes from the British Isles, including what became the country of Scotland, part of the heritage of the Presbyterian Church. The circle around the cross represents the sun, or light, as the Light of God. It also represents eternity—no beginning and no end, and so it has become the cross of our people.

Here's an interesting note. The Swastika which we now associate with the Nazi party of WWII Germany is actually a form of the cross. This cross was around for centuries before the Nazis hijacked it. It actually originated from a Sanskrit word that meant prosperity and wealth. I remember how horrified I was when I found a quilt that my great grandmother made that had squares of fabric with swastikas all over it. Later I found out that the quilt pre-dated WWII, and for her, she was giving blessings of prosperity and wealth to whoever received the quilt. A much better use of that particular cross!

And there are many others! But whichever cross we use, we must remember what they stand for as Christians, and that is the love of Christ, a love for us that was so great he will willing to go and die on a cross to bring us back to God. Remember the words of Jesus according to John, spoken from the upper room on the night of his betrayal:

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."

The Tomb—or more importantly the EMPTY tomb—represents the power of Christ. He cannot be defeated by death or by Satan or held in any one place. He can roll away any obstacles put in place to stop him from doing his Father's bidding. The empty tomb assures us that in Christ all will be well and through him, we will be brought back to God.

Consider for a moment the perspective of this photograph. It is from the inside of the tomb, looking out. It is Jesus' perspective. He is not looking back at the place of death, but out into the world—the world that Jesus has conquered by love. Remember that the apostle Paul said:

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will affliction or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword? ³⁶ As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered."

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than victorious through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The Table—we have been talking a lot about the symbol of the table in recent months, in part because I am fascinated with it. The table symbolizes togetherness and community. It's being invited to the banquet. It's that lovely place we see in commercials on TV, where all are gathered for food and fun and fellowship. It is the kind of community that is made perfect by the presence of the host of the party, our Lord Jesus Christ, who wants everyone to be included and fed—physically and spiritually. This makes me think of the passage out of Acts that describes the first Christian community that gathered around the table after Easter and after the coming of the Spirit among them:

"Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home^[k] and ate their food with glad and generous^[l] hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved."

The message of these three symbols is one we need to hold on to. The cross tells us that God loved us enough to send his son whose mission was to bring us all back to God, and who loved us enough to die on a cross to do just that. The tomb tells us that we belong to a powerful God who can break through any barriers put in the way to bring peace, justice, unity and love to this world. The table tells us that we are in this

together, that we belong to each other and that we all are invited to the banquet.

Of what then, shall we be afraid? Remember that Psalm 27 says:

*The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?*

*The LORD is the stronghold^[a] of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?*

*When evildoers assail me
to devour my flesh—
my adversaries and foes—
they shall stumble and fall.*

*³ Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war rise up against me,
yet I will be confident.*

*⁴ One thing I asked of the LORD;
this I seek:*

*to live in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the LORD,
and to inquire in his temple.*

*⁵ For he will hide me in his shelter
on the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will set me high on a rock.*

*⁶ Now my head is lifted up
above my enemies all around me,
and I will offer in his tent
sacrifices with shouts of joy;*

I will sing and make melody to the LORD.

*¹³ I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living.*

*¹⁴ Wait for the LORD;
be strong, and let your heart take courage;
wait for the LORD!*

And so as we leave this Easter Season and move into ordinary time, I urge you to take these symbols with you. With the Cross, the Tomb and the Table with you, nothing can stop you!

Alleluia, and Amen!