
The Cross is the Power of God

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A sermon by Canon Wallace Marsh

The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (1 Corinthians 1: 18)

During the summer of 2005 I was working as a chaplain at St. Luke's and Texas Children's Hospitals in Houston, TX. One evening I remember being paged to visit a patient at Texas Children's Hospital. The patient was a 12 year-old boy who was in the final hours of a terminal illness. The nurses paged me because they were concerned about the mother sitting alone in the room with no one to talk too.

I arrived on the floor and the nurses directed me toward the room; it felt as though I was stepping into the presence of the holy. The boy's mother was keeping a silent vigil and the only noise came from the machines keeping the young boy alive. I walked over to introduce myself as the chaplain and took a seat next to the mother.

At undoubtedly one of the most difficult moments in this mother's life, she wanted to have a conversation about God, but she didn't want her son to overhear us talking. The need for privacy posed a problem because she did not want to leave her son's side in case he were to briefly regain consciousness. She wanted him to know she was there with him. So the mother got up, stepped outside the room and asked the nurse at the observation station if we could sit there and have a private conversation. The nurse obliged which meant we were able to be outside the room, yet see into it.

When I stepped outside the room the mother began speaking: "You know that I have been preparing for this moment for years. We knew enough about my son's disease, about the different stages, the timeline, and we were able to prepare."

She went on to say, "We went to therapy groups, support groups, we have our own community that walked with us and will continue to give me strength, but at this moment, I realize how unprepared I am for my son's death, it is so hard to be a parent and not be able to do anything for your child."

I nodded in agreement and asked about her son's preparation. I said, "How was your son doing spiritually as he approached these final days?"

She said, "Amazing. He is so strong; he is much stronger than me." "Why?" I asked. "Well, for starters," she said, "he has a faith that I do not have." "What do you mean?" I replied.

She went on to say, "We are Christians. I raised my son in the church and for the longest time I thought his faith was like that of a child; that the day would come when his pain, suffering and eventual mortality would cause him to question God and lose his faith. Ironically, as he became weaker his faith only got stronger."

Silence is hard for an extrovert, but I let there be silence. I wanted her to hear what she just said about her son's faith. The silence was helpful because I was questioning my pastoral skills: I was 25 years old. I didn't have children. I didn't have much

personal experience and quoting a passage of scripture or recounting something from a theology book wasn't going to speak to the severity of the situation. But in that moment of silence, God sent me a little pastoral intuition. I began to realize the only person that could speak and spiritually console this mother was the person that wasn't able to speak""Her son!

So I said, "If your son were able to speak to you right now, if he knew where you were spiritually, if he knew how you were struggling in your faith, what would he say? What advice would he give you in this difficult hour?" She paused for a second and then began to speak, "I know exactly what he would say," and she pointed.

As I looked through the glass, I noticed a cross! It was standing on the table leaning against the wall. She pointed to the cross!

At this point tears began to fill her eyes (and mine) and she said, "he came to the hospital knowing he would not leave; he insisted on taking his cross." She continued, "in these last days, as he slipped in and out of consciousness, the nurses would reposition him, and he would ask me to move the cross so he could see it. When my son became unconscious I really wanted to take down the cross. I was angry with God and I didn't want to look at it as I sat watching my son die. But I kept it up just for him, and in these last hours I cannot seem to take my eyes off of it."

I replied, "Madam, I think your son's faith is an example to follow. There is something about the power of the cross that speaks to us in the face of suffering and death. It is difficult to understand, it is difficult to grasp, but God speaks to us through it."

She responded, "As I sit and wait I will pray that God uses that cross to speak to me." We went in, said a prayer, hugged, and the last thing I looked at as I left the room was the young boy's cross.

That young boy believed and understood Paul's words: *"The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."*

In this third week of Lent may we all experience the power of the cross and proclaim its message of grace and love. AMEN.