

Think the Things of God

✠ Drawn to the cross (vv.21-23)

✠ Denying yourself (vv.24-26)

In the name of Jesus that saving name, dearly redeemed:

If you grew up on a farm, you may have experience with 4-H; otherwise, animals at Minnesota State Fair. For kids in the forests out west it was FFA – Future Foresters of America. Fire control using back fires, treetop fires, tools and a tour of the smoke jumper training school in Redmond, Oregon, were all part of the mix. Some kids excited to parachute into fire zones were not encouraged by grandparents.

Flashback: September 1, 1894. For years loggers had left piles of branches, often sparked ablaze by passing trains. Halfway to Duluth was Hinkley, boasting twenty-two trains a day. Rain from May to August, 1894, only 2” and constant smoke. Saturday, September 1st a hot day with cold air mass above in an inversion keeping smoke and gases below. Finally hot air burned through into a chimney effect. Two fires south of Hinkley joined into a firestorm 4½ miles high, visible over 200 miles south in Mason City, Iowa. Tracks melted as 1400 residents in Hinkley and other towns ran from terror. One train rescuing hundreds northward barely made it over the burning Kettle River bridge before it collapsed. Estimates of deaths top out at 480, more than died in the Great Chicago Fire. Some who survived in Skunk Lake or Hinkley’s flooded gravel pit thought it was Judgment Day. The fire temperature was over 2,000 F.

Fast forward to our more “enlightened” era. Environmental laws out west make it illegal to cut up fallen trees or clean up brush for your fireplace. Wildfires every summer. Underbrush is mandated by man who now denies any possibility of a Creator, much less a Judgment Day of fire. Goals of a “natural” forest ignore recent scholarship of American Indians burning the underbrush to clear their forests.¹ The lesson for us? The dear Holy Spirit calls softly again today: **Think the Things of God.**

✠ Drawn to the cross (vv.21-23)

Catastrophic experience always seems far away for others until it storms your home. Remember last Sunday’s sermon to get a sense of how catastrophic this must have been for Peter. His best intentions are coming out here, aren’t they? Jesus just commended Peter’s awesome confession of faith: **“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”** (16:16 EHV²) But when his dear Savior and Messiah started telling them **that he had to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and experts in the law, and be killed, and on the third day be raised again”?** That was too much for Peter. His Messiah should not die in shame! Just trying to help, Peter took Jesus aside and scolded, **“Mercy, Lord! This will never happen to you.”** (TPA) Jesus saw this affecting the others too.

Natural reaction, right? If your grandson or granddaughter wants to be a smoke jumper...“Maybe we can find work for you around here.” Jesus wants to suffer and die – Why? Why would you say that?

Don’t think the cross is more popular today. **“For the message of 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 EHV) There was no other way to remove the guilt of sin from humans. Jesus **“had to”** suffer and die. He turned and rebuked Peter, **“Get behind me, Satan! You are a snare to me because you are not thinking the things of God, but the things of men.”** Out of deep, eternal love for lost souls, Jesus was **Drawn to the cross.**

¹ Mann, Charles C. 1491 – *NEW REVELATIONS OF THE AMERICAS BEFORE COLUMBUS*. Vintage, 2nd ed., © 2011.

² EHV ~ *Evangelical Heritage Version* (<http://wartburgproject.org>) © 2019. NPH: 800-662-6022, Amazon-Kindle, LOGOS.

Teenagers feel this a lot, but it starts in 4th or 5th grade. You're trying so hard to be a good friend, but classmates keep turning away, maybe even bullying you on social media. You're doing your best at home, but maybe your parents are arguing, so no one seems to care what's happening with you. You can't know this, but they're probably trying their best too. Everybody's best intentions can backfire.

Way back in 1894, European immigrants made a living by logging for construction in new cities like Milwaukee and Chicago. Environmentalists today are doing their best to stop climate change in thirty years even if they can't change the weather tomorrow. Yet God wants to save all from eternal fire.

People in ranch country have been taught from an early age to escape from a range fire by starting a backfire. Burn a place out in the grass where you can safely stand as the range fire passes you by. That's like the flooded Hinkley gravel pit, such an eyesore in town, but a lifesaver from the firestorm.

Jesus scolded Peter because He knows what's coming. Later Peter wrote in his Second Epistle about global burning as earth ends: ***“That day will cause the heavens to be set on fire and destroyed, and the elements to melt as they burn with great heat.”*** (2 Peter 3:12 EHV) Thanks to Jesus **Drawn to the Cross**, God has provided us a place where we can safely stand, a place where he has already poured out His white-hot anger over our sin. That place is the cross of Jesus our Savior. On the cross Jesus already paid the punishment we deserve. Jesus Christ is our backfire. We stand in safety as the fire of God's wrath circles around and passes us by. When Jesus comes again on the last day, for all who have been given the gift of faith, it won't be as our Judge to destroy us but rather as our Savior, to welcome us into heaven.³ You might say, “This train is bound for glory.” But you can only get on by...

✠ Denying yourself (vv.24-26)

Deny yourself...take up your cross...follow Jesus – sounds so simple. Retired Professor Dan Deutschlander writes: “Jesus made it clear that the cross, that *self* denial, was the cost of discipleship.... Too easily we dismiss Jesus' words to the rich young ruler [Matthew 19:21 – ***“If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”*** EHV] with the observation that Jesus spoke those words to one who worshiped his wealth – as though none among us would ever do such a thing!...We can end up covering over the cross of *self* denial with a gospel that has become a pillow and a couch for the rich young ruler in each of us.”⁴ One family in the Hinkley fire lost their grandma when she jumped off the wagon and ran back to the house for her purse. In the end does it matter how many TVs you had or how new your furniture and appliances were – or your house just a few years old – if wild fires take everything? What about your life? Your eternal soul?

Again, from Him who loved you enough to willingly sacrifice His own innocent soul in your place and mine: ***“Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. After all, what will it benefit a person if he gains the whole world, but forfeits his soul? Or what can a person give in exchange for his soul?”*** What did God give for your soul? ***“God loved world so much that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. The one who believes in him is not condemned, but the one who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God.”*** (John 3:16-18 NETNT, EHV)

Are there slash piles smoldering in the forests of your heart? Bitterness, resentment just waiting to burst into flame in winds of strife and envy? No one has the skill to clear them safely like the dear Holy Spirit in Word and sacraments. Douse the flames in the water of your Baptism as you think how God loves to call you His own. Clear the piles with the bulldozer of God's kindness that can move mountains with His grace. Pray for God-fearing officials to rule in wisdom that begins with the fear of the Lord. **Drawn to the cross**, find cool refreshment as you **Think the Things of God**. Come, Lord Jesus, Amen.

³ *Preach the Word*, Westendorf, James, ed. Vol. 4, No. 3, January/February 2001, p.3.

⁴ Deutschlander, Daniel M. *THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS – Reflections on His Cross and Ours*. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2008. Second, Third printings, 2009), pp. 73f. Order: 1-800-662-6022. For *The Preacher's Apprentice (TPA)* sermon study or copies: m.cordes@comast.net . New Life Evangelical Lutheran Church You can also call: 651-484-1169. Hear the sermon at www.newlifeshoreview.com . 180 County Rd F - Shoreview, MN 55126