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1 Cor. 1:18 ff

XI

— FR Mission in Orlando Fla Nov. 6, 1977
1st Baptist Church

Theme: The cross in a changing world
and our Victory Thru Christ

Message: 1 Cor. 1:18 ff

Message No. 50 - The cross, not a Tragedy

Ref. - Jn. 12:25

pp. 1-8

Side -

Time

Message No. 51 - The cross in a changing world &
our Victory - Christ.

Ref. 1 Cor. 1:18, 21

pp. 8-14 3:17-17

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Subj: The Cross in a Changing World and our Victory
through Christ
- History of Church in Uganda

The church of Uganda, Anglican, celebrated its 100th anniversary this year. This is our hundredth year since the good news of Jesus Christ reached Uganda through the missionaries of the church of England in 1877. That church begun very well, but it wasn't long before that church, young as it was, hardly having put down any roots at all, was caught in a persecution in 1885, barely ten years of church life. In that persecution our first Bishop, Bishop Hannington whom you have in your new book of record, was taken by one of the chiefs and speared to death at the command of the king of Uganda. Then after him hundreds of Christians were murdered by the same king whose father had invited the missionaries to come. The father died and then the young son was ill advised by those who did not love Christianity and he started the exercise of eliminating all Christians from the map, which he could have done very easily because there weren't many in those days, the church had just begun within the past ten years.

martyrdoms
in Uganda

Among these matyrs the church will remember three boys. The youngest eleven and the oldest fifteen. These boys were working in the palace of the king. Then the young king was incensed with his ego and who used the citizens simply to satisfy his needs. He wanted these boys to serve him in his perverted way. The boys refused, which had never been done in the history of the country. No one had ever said, "No," to his majesty the king. If you said no, you knew it would cost you your head immediately. The three boys said, "No. We will serve your majesty in any other way you choose, but not in any service which goes against our faith with Jesus Christ." Immediately the king was outraged and he decided that the boys should be put into prison. Because of their age he gave them a chance after twenty four hours, to change their minds.

So, they put them in prison and then they brought them back to the court of the king, the palace was all astir, no one ever had heard a thing like that, and the boys stood. They were given another chance, and the boys firmly, gently, with real joy and power, they repeated their firm decision. "We will serve in any other way except when service goes against our newly found Jesus Christ." So, they were taken, their hands tied behind their backs, they were led from the palace with a mob of non-Christians behind them brandishing their clubs and knives, and the three little boys were walked four miles to the place of their execution. A big fire had been made, bundles of dry wood were prepared in which to put their bodies and burn them. The boys were given the last chance to change their minds. The parents were in tears, "Why don't you change your minds and go back and serve his majesty?" Then you will save yourselves and stay alive." The boys said, "Impossible. We can't serve him except when service does not oppose our faith in Jesus Christ."

In other words, these boys had discovered a strange way of looking at life. They had discovered a strange power which no one in the community, no one in the palace, not even their parents understood what it was which was making these boys act the way they acted. They became a mystery to their own people. If you like, they really were strangers in their own people and land. At least they acted very strangely, so the executioner put the boys in the bundles of dry wood, some of them had their arms chopped off and then they tied their bodies and they were going to throw them into the fire, but before this terrible thing happened the boys were singing a song which is now in our hymn books, marked "The martyrs song." The song was a translation of a hymn from the Old Testament and the refrain

of this hymn runs, "Oh that I had wings such as angels have, I would have flown and been with Jesus." They kept singing this as they were taken and thrown into the fire. They died, that was 1885.

Again, they were not the only ones but their story comes out more conspicuously particularly because of their age. They put on this beautiful fight and died in the fight, and do you know what happened that day? In the evening, under the cover of the night, forty adults went to the missionary Alexander McKai, and they said to him, he was sick with malaria and depression expecting his turn to come for the king to take him and kill him. Remember, at that time the British had not yet made Uganda their colony, brought Uganda under their administration. The missionaries were there long before the colonial powers came, however; McKai received forty adults and they said, "Missionary, we want you to baptise us. Seeing the boys die the way they died, singing, we accepted their God and we have come to ask you to baptise us." The three boys died in a terrible way, if you like in a very tragic way, and here are forty adults becoming Christians on the same day, because you see, the three boys did not die tragically, let us ~~the~~ change the vocabulary. When the boys stood, when they spoke in the name of Jesus, when they sang their way into the fire, that was not tragedy at all, it was simply a repetition of what took place outside the city nearly two thousand years ago.

When a lonely figure, Jesus, carrying a piece of wood, the cross, which we have made now into a sign of beauty, a sign of peace, on that day when the saviour took it upon his own shoulders and it was too heavy because he kept falling under its weight, and he reached a place called Calvary where they put him on the tree and they burned him. Crucified him.

40 adults
came to
the Lord
as
result of
3 boys
died

The crucifixion
of Jesus

Was that tragedy? Yes, it seemed tragic to Peter and to John, and to Thomas, and Batholemew, and the women on that day as they looked at the dying saviour, the dying master after whom they had followed, with whom they had stayed, whom they had listened to, whom they had seen doing wonders among the people. To the small band of disciples it couldn't have been more tragic. It was a heart breaking experience indeed, but it was a turning of history from that moment of Good Friday when the eternal God who had our humanity on him, swept his arms silently, bowed his shoulder silently, and succumbed as it were, under the load which he carried. That was the turning point for human history. From that Good Friday a new hub was established in its center around which all the experiences of life were going to evolve, and revolving took place. A new direction was established.

So you see, the little boys in Uganda did not die tragically, they simply re-enacted what happened at Calvary centuries before. Do you see the three boys being marched, behind them a mob brandishing clubs and knives, and the three little, weak, helpless boys steadily moving to the place of execution. May I paint a verse on them? John 12:25, he Jesus said, "Unless a grain of wheat falls in prepared ground and dies there, it remains a helpless, single, isolated grain. But when it falls in the prepared ground and dies, what happens?" What happens when it dies? The Lord Jesus Christ had a beautiful way of using simple things to bring out the whole truth. He says, "It ceases to be a single grain. It loses its inability to reproduce. It steps from the realm of isolation into the realm of multiplicity. It becomes an exciting grain. It can no longer be alone. It loses its helplessness." This is Christianity at its best. It then produces numerous other grains,

Not a tragedy

that's why Christian writers have repeatedly said, 'The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.' What seed? Not a seed in the bud, not the seed for consumption, but a seed for multiplicity. A seed which has ability to bring other seeds. *cont. p. 4*

That happened in Uganda at the beginning of the church, and now Uganda has got $3\frac{1}{2}$ million Anglicans, people who claim to belong to the church are more than $3\frac{1}{2}$ million. Could you have expected that from such beginnings as those? Could you have expected that there was likely to be a church of that multitude when its believers faced foul execution, horrible experiences. That's exactly the meaning of the cross, *cont. p. 7*

but now we have grown into twenty diocese, twenty two Bishops of our own, an Arch-Bishop, second to the Ugandan Arch-Bishop, an excited man of God, thrilled by the good news, and a man because of the good news has fallen in love with the people of Uganda, his own people. To him life was no longer important except as it witnessed the good news of the grace of God, and in that good news of the cross of Jesus Christ he had caught a vision of what is the value of one life of man. You see, my dear friends, the cross which I am going to share with you the message of the gospel, because the topic of our mission is "The cross in a changing world, and our victory through Christ," which is the topic of our mission. What an exciting topic. But what a costly topic. *Cont. p. 8*

The cross

Begin message

We ended our century of celebration with another martyr, not one, there have been Ugandans already who have died. The reason why the story of our dear Arch-Bishop comes out because he was the leader of the whole church of Uganda, Ruanda, Burundi and Zaire. Millions of christians. Then he died and shall we say tragically? He was shot dead taken from in front of me on the 16th of February. Broad daylight, eight Bishops, and he was

led from in front of us into a room. On the pretext that he was going to have a conference with President Amin. The whole day was full of shouts, "Kill them. Take them away," and so on. Not only Bishops but anyone who was considered dangerous to President Amin. Our Arch-Bishop died because he stood where the master stood. He stuck out his neck and made presentations again and again in writing and in person to President Amin, pleading with him to change his destructive policy under which literally thousands and thousands of innocent Ugandans had died. My own church is full of widows whose husbands died. Schools are full of orphans whose parents had been taken and murdered, dragged from their cars, dragged from their homes. I have found myself praying with them. A little baby I baptised a year ago in a neighbouring pastorate, the father a young business man, staunch supporter of the church, a Christian man who had organised some wonderful meetings in the city, in the town, was taken from his wife and child, Sunday afternoon, he was murdered a few yards away and his body was taken away and never seen again. Four days later his wife delivers another baby.

I remember my wife and I coming through the town. When the lady saw our car she sent a young man, her brother-in-law, "Call the Bishop." I came in and she couldn't say a word, she simply fell on the floor and wept her heart out. Then we took her to the home. The little girl I had baptised seeing me come, thought I was daddy. When she realised I wasn't daddy, she nearly went mad. Then the lady gave me the baby to hold in my hands and play with, in this beautiful home where the husband is no more.

These are the circumstances which kept driving some of us to make presentations to Amin. To ^{pro}test against these things which were making life

Amin's
murders

Woman's
husband
killed

a nightmare. Because of that the Arch-Bishop was taken and murdered and some of us had to leave. Then what about the church? Has the church succumbed? Can it continue? Can you go on preaching the gospel under these destructive circumstances? Yes.

I'm going to tell you one more story. On the 20th of February, when you people were praying for us. When you remembered on that Sunday the Arch-Bishop, because the news went around the world very fast in a matter of hours, so that day when you were praying remembering what had happened, and every denomination prayed for us throughout Europe, Australia, America, New Zealand, Asia, and everywhere. That very day, 4,500 Christians drove, walked to St. Paul's Cathedral. It would have been the day of his funeral but the government refused us to see his body. The grave in which he was going to be buried, alongside the grave of Bishop Hannington, remained open. I was still in the city on that day and we decided to leave the grave open. Let the Christians come for a memorial or a thanksgiving service for their Arch-Bishop and see the empty tomb. So they came, they packed out the church, four thousand five hundred of them. Six Bishops were leading the service on that beautiful Sunday. Indeed, it was beautiful, danger was in the air everywhere, agents were running around among these people threatening, but the Christians came, packed the Cathedral out, sang as never before. There was a missionary who was in the congregation and later she told me., there was hardly a dry eye, but I thought we were going to heaven. The singing. After the preaching done by one of the Bishops, the crowd went outside and stood silently around the open grave. The former Arch-Bishop read from the New Testament, from the story of the angels to the women when the

angels said, "Christ is not here. He has arisen." And I am told that as soon as those words were said the entire congregation burst into a spontaneous song of praise, again and again and again, singing the martyrs song.

This is the church of God. This is the church under pressure, but not succumbing. Persecuted but not thrown down, harrassed but not left alone, yes in Pain but not in despair. The church on the cross.

They celebrated the centenary year on June the thirtieth, crowds of them gathered in Kampala to celebrate the climax of the centenary which is June the 30th, the day of the hundred years. I am told by the eye witness again that 25,000 Christians gathered, most of them spent two days and nights sleeping out on the hill of the Cathedral called the hill of peace, and they sang, and they prayed all night, then they celebrated on the thirtieth by having a procession through the city. The Bishops in their robes, the priests all in their robes, the young people with bands and drums and crosses, they sang through the city, 25,000 of them. I am told that the procession was so powerful that the President Amin allowed his police band to join then. So he too said, somehow, that they must join the procession. So, this is the church of Christ as it is. They are evangelising Uganda like mad, they are telling the story which I am going to read in a few words then I will leave it to you to consider.

I Corinthians 1:18 says St. Paul as he writes to these Christian brothers in the city of Corinth, "The word of the cross is to those who are perishing, who are on their way to _____, foolishness." In other words, those who are on the way to eternal isolation from God who makes

Ugandan
centenary

The cross

not message
I

entire
message

life meaningful, to those it is foolishness, the cross is foolishness. To those of us who are being saved it is the power of God. The cross the power of God? Paul you must be mad, you are really confusing us, the cross cannot be power. A helpless person hanging with the nails in his hands. A person who cannot even drive a fly from his own body, dare you to say that that is God? Unless you explain I don't understand. He goes on vs.21, "Though since the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believed. For indeed, Jews the religious people, asked for signs as proof of the presence of God. Religious people are always after signs, wonders, so that those wonders and signs may prove that yes, God is here. That's why religions wanted signs and wonders. Okay, so the religious usually go for signs and wonders as proof, the Jews were not exceptions.

What about the others, the Greeks, the sophisticated, the clever, the philosophers, seek for wisdom. They look for a reasonable answer to the complications of life. They look for logic in their experiences which shatter men and women. You can't blame them because they are serious. They want to make sense out of life. They want a reasoned and a reasonable way of making sense out of this life. You can't blame them, they wrote beautiful works, and books on wisdom, on good life, on morality, on all these wonderful subjects, they wrote about them.

So, Paul says, "Two categories. The religious usually go for signs of wonder because they are looking for the presence of God. The clever, sophisticated, the philosophers look for logic in life. Meaning in experiences." Now he goes on and he says, "Listen to what the cross is to

both groups. We preach Christ, the one crucified, to the Jews, the religious people who are seeking wonders, a stumbling block." Why? Because a Jew, looking for power, demonstration of miraculous movement of Jehovah, to say to him that that criminal ~~like person~~ hanging on the cross is the Messiah, you see the Jew shaking his head, deeply offended, absolutely outraged. You hear him saying, "Can you make sense out of that? My life is confused and you point me to a person who is bleeding in violence, and saying that he can make sense out of my confusion? You want to add confusion to already confounded confusion?"

Foolishness to Greeks

It is foolishness to the Greek. What about you and me, believers.? Paul Gets a little excited and this is what he says, "But to those who are called, those whom God has given invitation to come to him. The called one." Is that your position in the church? Have you ever known that you are one of those specially invited guests into the grace of God? Does it excite you? St. Paul says, "But to those whom God has invited, whom God has extended his gracious invitation, to those who have responded what is it? Both Jews and the Greeks, Christ is the power of God, and the wisdom of God." How did you come to that conclusion? "Oh, let me tell you it is very easy. You come and listen. I was on the road to Damascus one afternoon, absolutely up in arms, full of anger because I was outraged by these people who preach a crucified messiah. In my zeal as a good Jew, a trained pharisee, a graduate of Gamalie College, a full blooded Hebrew, s citizen of Tarsus, I was simply determined to bring to an end this terrible infectious heresy. On the road to Damascus, all keyed up, all up in arms, determined, seething in anger and actually suffering from inside for no one can hate and get away

St Paul

with it. Remember, no one can hate in the heart and get away with it."

Paul was a sick person as he was, trotted along the road to Damascus.

He was on a destructive mission. As he came near Damascus an unexpected interview was waiting for him, for as he came round the corner, heaven opened, smashing lights surrounded him, and in the middle of the light a confrontation. What was the confrontation? You reach these issues you don't have to search very hard, it's all there. In confrontation it is Him, Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Jesus who you are persecuting Paul. An angry man torn apart by his anger and resentment and bigotry. A segregationist of the first class. He based it on theology and there are people who are still doing it today. I can't put my hand in yours because your theology is not right. I can't greet you because you don't carry the same label as mine. Yes, I love Jesus so much that I dare not greet you.

How

I am using irony, but there are still people who hate one another in the name of Jesus Christ. They have not yet been brought to the cross. They know it theologically but it hasn't operated on the person inside. Paul in the light underwent an operation, only the hand which operated on Paul was the ^{wounded} ~~only~~ hand. A hand wounded for that man. Out to destroy Jesus, then Jesus receives him, opens him up, love smashes the walls, forgives the sins of hate and murder, liberates this Jew to become so full that in the end he speaks with almost madness. He was called mad by those who observed his enthusiasm.

Paul turned round and he said, "The cross which used to offend, which was a stumbling block has now become the only _____ of God. In it I have discovered the invitation of the loving God, who so loved me that he gave himself for me. I now am a captive of that love. Everything for that love."

Everything has now become lost in comparison, surpassing glory of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." Corinthians 3:7-11. My what a change. The man was narrow, now he is open wide. The man had a center the center was Saul, now the center is Christ, a liberated man. The man was Saul the Jew, now he is Paul the Christian open for more. What a change. The wisdom of God. Now he can see the meaning of life, now he can see how to relate to other people. The Greeks received a new meaning, other Jews have received a new meaning, the Africans, the Americans, the blacks, the browns, the pinks, oh yes, they have all completely received a new value, why? Because Christ died for them and when Paul's eyes were opened he saw not Jesus hanging helplessly on the cross, he saw eternal love embracing a broken humanity. Eternal, living love embracing bleeding hearts. Those sparks of mercy.

Do you know that from that moment that the gospel, Paul became the gospel of love. Can you imagine a greater change than that. Oh yes, he discovered that God loved and loved until he died because he loved too much. If you wanted to write a good accusation fitting what Jesus was going through on the cross, the fitting accusation is not 'the king of the Jews' that is what Pilot and others thought, The proper accusation as far as we are concerned should be, 'he is guilty of loving too much.' He loved until he forgot himself in love and he came and paid the price of love. And when love goes as far as that, now this is the gospel for you Episcopalians, when love goes as far as that. When love goes through to the point of death and through death, then there is nothing in you which that love cannot redeem. There is no broken experience which that love cannot heal. There is not deep need which that love cannot reach.

Gospel of Love

There is no broken relationship between you and any person in this world which that love cannot reconcile and keep, therefore, the cross has become the starting point, the continuing point, and the ending point for he sits on the throne as the lamb slain before the world ever ~~w~~ begun.

That is Jesus, the glorified but still showing his wounded hands, bleeding for you and for me. The cross is victory, the cross is not negative. It is the greatest positive experience that you find that the divine plan has ever brought to us. Once you are caught in it, Paul says, "Once you discover the wisdom of God and the power, then you can stand," like Arch-Bishop Janani, "You can stand like the boys who died in

1885, you can stand as my friend Andrea who died in Burundi in a bloody revolution four years ago when the revolutionary soldiers came to his school, rounded up his students, shut them in the compound of the school then called Andrea, the teacher, "Come, we are going to kill you." Andrea was led away from his home, and he stood, there were a number of soldiers with their guns ready to shoot him, and he said, "Would you give me a chance to say something?" and they said, "Say on quickly." And this is what Andrea said, a committed christian, a school teacher about thirty two years old with a wife and three children. He looked them in the eye and he said, "I love you. Two, I love my country I am not a traitor. Three, may I sing you a song?" So, he stood there and he sang four stanzas of a well known hymn in his mother tongue to these soldiers who were his countrymen. And the song is a well known song in the English books, translated into the Kirundi language. "Out of my bondage, sorrow and sin, Jesus I come, Jesus I come. Out of my misery into your wealth, Jesus I come, Jesus I come to you." Again and again came the refrain "Jesus I come, Jesus I come." When he finished he put his arms down and they

Andrea of
Burundi

e shot his dead. He is still speaking. He died, but he is still speaking. The cross can make a coward a warrior. The cross can make trembling hands, act and work. The cross makes missionaries do. You all are enlisted missionaries. | You don't have to cross the Atlantic, there are bleeding people next door, there are lonely people in your country, there are tired ones in your community, they need the touch of the wounded hands. Are you open?

p The cross in a changing world is the only remedy for human needs whatever they are. Open, and I know miracles will take place. Is your faith tired? Need refreshment, then come to the cross that is where tired faith is mended and renewed. Are you always ashamed to talk about Jesus in the typical Episcopalian way, may I give you a hint or two, if you want to speak very well, please turn to Calvary, you can't look into his blessed hands without feeling fire in your soul, and your tongue will be bubbling with little messages. You don't have to be special, all you have to do is just look at Calvary.

So God bless you, the cross is the only place that can set you on fire. It did it for Paul, and he was very cold, it can do it for you.