

*What Does "Lutheran" Mean?* with Pastor Ruud  
Session 3 Study Guide  
April 2021 - Mount Olivet Adult Education

**Theology of the Cross: The power of God found in puny, weak, hidden things, and why we often seek something more**

**Pastor Ruud's Intro:** In the presentation I noted how this can be a difficult theological distinction because our human worldviews so often operate contrary to the message of the cross of Christ. Whereas a theology of glory operates and asserts worldly "success" is an indication of God's love and value for us - that a person who is wealthier, healthier, better looking, of higher social standing, happier, smarter, having better relationships etc. is an indication of greater love from God, or greater love for God will make one so – a theology of the cross operates and asserts that God's suffering in, with, and for all people and creation in the death of Christ on the cross is the primary location, promise, and certainty of God's love which seeks us out in the very places of human need, including sickness, sin, grief, and death based on no merit of our own, disconnected and even over and against worldly success, and received through faith alone. The distinction can get cloudy, and yet it holds much meaning for how we think of God and ourselves in relationship to God and life.

**Key Texts/Points**

[1 Corinthians 1:18-25](#) | 18 For 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. .... 23 but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

[Philippians 2:5-8](#) | 5 Let the same mind be in you that was\* in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, 7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, 8 he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross.

Thesis 19-22 of Martin Luther's Heidelberg Disputation (1518):

19) That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things that have happened.

20) He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.

21) A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the things what it is.

22) That wisdom that sees the invisible things of God in works as perceived by man is completely puffed up, blinded, and hardened.

## Questions for Discussion:

1. After hearing the presentation and reading the texts, try to describe the difference between a theology of glory and a theology of the cross in your own words. Have you ever felt yourself operating out of a theology of glory, believing that one's worldly "success" is the indication of God's favor?
2. Describe the message of Grünewald's *Isenheim Altarpiece* located in a hospital for people suffering from the plague and other skin diseases, as shown in the presentation. If you were to create an artistic work of Jesus in the same vein for today's contexts, how might you paint/draw it?
3. Jesus' beatitudes in the Gospel of Matthew ([5:1-13](#)) display a theology of the cross, i.e. "Blessed are the poor in spirit... blessed are those who mourn... blessed are the meek..." What would some beatitudes of a theology of glory look like? (A possible example: Blessed are the healthy, for they have obeyed God's wishes.)
4. Luther's 21st thesis in his Heidelberg Disputation says, "A theologian of the cross calls a thing what it is." A possible example may be when a person dies tragically, a person operating from a theology of the cross might weep and state the truth of the terrible grief and anguish of it, and proclaim and embody the presence of God's love based on the truth of God's suffering on the cross. Meanwhile, a person operating from a theology of glory might say, "God needed another angel in heaven" or "everything will be okay because everything happens for a reason." Think about other possible examples and try to describe what Luther means by saying "A theologian of the cross calls a thing what it is."
5. A Theology of Glory is often set forth as a faithful version of self-help. While self-help has its value, think about the limitations.
6. Ponder this phrase from Luther's Heidelberg Disputation: "sinners are attractive because they are loved; they are not loved because they are attractive."

For extra credit... of which there is none :)

Read the entirety of Martin Luther's Heidelberg Disputation. It can be found at this link:

<https://bookofconcord.org/sources-and-context/heidelberg-disputation/>