Accepted as Righteous

Genesis 17: 1-7, 15& 16 Romans 4:13-25 Mark 8: 31-38

Psalm 22: 23-31

**Summary: It is not my cross, which I take up to follow Jesus, which saves me: it is His Cross.**

In the Hebrew Scriptures, we see Abram become Abraham, father of many nations. He is an old man and Sarai, who will become Sarah, is long past the time when she might hope for babies. Yet, God’s promise is a sure thing. As the Apostle Paul later explains, God’s promise is not a sure thing because of Abraham’s strength and vigor, nor because he was obedient; after all there is no law, yet, to obey. Moses is not born yet, and the 10 Commandments are still on God’s draft table.

No, the impossible is a sure thing for two reasons: it is God making the promise and Abraham believes it. Abraham was not strong enough, but God is. Abraham was not holy enough, but God accepted him as righteous because his faith gave God’s love an opening to work.

I’ve presented this dramatization before, but I want to share it again. Then, Jesus said to his disciples: “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me.”

So, when I decided to follow Jesus, God gave me a cross [mime reception].

Woah! Man, this cross is heavy! It must be 15 feet tall and two feet wide! Uhhh! Erk! It’ll take me years to follow Jesus lugging this around! Well, I’ll get my saw out and trim this a bit! [Mine saw, move to chainsaw mime]

O.K., that’s easier [mime two hand carry] Now, Jesus went this way [mime walk]. Hey, look at that store: free samples! Look at all that food, and what are they drinking in those little cups? Where is all that funky smoke coming from? [Mime trying to enter but cross won’t fit through the door.]

Well, I’ll just trim a bit more [trim to one-hand carry and enter] Erk, all that rich food makes me bloated and sick. Those drinks make me dizzy, and all that smoke makes me stupid! Jesus is nowhere in here, either. I better move on uptown [Mime exit and walk].

Hey, look at this cool dance club. Man, they are having fun, and – whoo-hoo – that is one, hot Scott! My, God had a good day when he made that face, and he has nice moves! I wonder if he like to slow dance? [Mime entry and dance]

Why are they all looking at me funny? Say, I’m the only one here holding a cross! Well, I only need my whittling knife for this [mime whittle, tuck pocket size cross into bra and dance.]

You know, he dances well, but we both want to lead! He won’t go where I want him to, and when I follow, he takes me where I don’t want to go! Worse, he doesn’t care about Jesus or want to know him. “You know, boy-o, I’m going back to looking for Jesus, come along or stay as you like [mime exit]

Finally, I reached the end of my journey. Ahead were the tower of Heaven, New Jerusalem. There, standing before an open door, was Jesus, but there was a deep chasm between us. Smoke rose from a river of fire running along the bottom of the ravine. : Jesus,” I yelled, “how do I get over to you?”

“Use your cross,” Jesus replied. “That’s your bridge! Come on over; Dad and I have a banquet ready for you!”

[Mime pulling out and staring at the teensy cross and casting it into the chasm.]

Help! Here is where my original story ended: a warning not to whittle down your cross. But, a couple Pentecosts ago, God expanded the ending.

“Help,” said, “Jesus, I whittled my cross down when it was too heavy, and I was weak, lazy, and impatient, I whittled it more to fit into places to satisfy greed, knowing you weren’t there. I really whittled and hid it when people looked at me funny and I cared more for their opinion than yours. What was left just fell into the chasm and it will never help me cross over to you.”

Jesus answered, “I knew that about your cross, but I never whittled mine down. I used it to cross here, open the gate, and I’m here for you. Do you believe God loves you anyway and that I’m the one sent to bring you home?”

“I do.”

“I do, too.” Than he spread out his arms and blew out a mighty wind which blew away the smoke pouring out of the chasm. There, previously hidden by black fumes was Jesus’ Cross, bridge three feet wide and thirty feet long leading right to his outstretched arms.

“Look at me,” Jesus called. “Don’t look down or back; just come to me!” [Mime tentative, careful, then joyous approach.]

When I embrace Him, I could hear music coming from the banquet prepared for me [hum the Wedding March.] “This party: it’s more than welcoming a prodigal home, isn’t it?”

“We both said, “I do.” He replied. “The church is my Bride in Heaven. It’s our wedding day! Wait till you see this food and taste this wine; it’s heavenly! What would you like to have first?”

“Our wedding Dance.” [Mime waltz.] “You know, I had trouble dancing on Earth because I wanted to lead. I’ll have no trouble here; I trust your lead.” [Mime entry and kiss.]

What happens next, I don’t know yet, but I will, and so will you. It’s not my cross or my faithfulness which saves me. I can only hope to be accounted as righteous because Jesus never whittled down His Cross. If we trust God in Jesus, this is what makes the difference. So, this Lent, it is not what you give up that gives you hope; rather, it is what you take on, so long as you take on the Cross of Christ. Let’s do that today, and let’s persist!