

CHRIST THE KING LUTHERAN CHURCH

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HOLY CROSS DAY

The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

September 13, 2026

Numbers 21:4b-9; Psalm 98:1-4; 1 Corinthians 1:18-24; Saint John 3:13-17 (Hebrews 12:1-2)

In nomine Jesu!

Rally Day is here: learning starts up, serving kicks into gear, singing gets better, praying deepens, and Christ the King begins our search for a new pastor. So, of course, we begin this new season with our eyes fixed on the cross, commemorating Holy Cross Day. The strange thing is that Christians gather to celebrate an instrument of execution. We don't hide it in a closet. We lift it high, trace it on our bodies, even sing about it. The cross is everywhere among us, but not as decoration, logo, or jewelry. Christ's cross is where God tells the truth about the world and the truth about God.

That truth meets God's people on the road. In the wilderness, the Hebrews "became impatient on the way." Freed from slavery. Fed with manna. Led by God. They still whined, "Are we there yet?" Like children in the back seat. Like a council meeting in its third hour. Weariness is real. So, when serpents came among them, God told Moses to lift up a bronze serpent. Those who looked up lived.

In the Gospel, Jesus applies this story to himself: "Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up." The cure looks like the wound. The sign of death becomes the means of life. This is not how we would have arranged salvation. We prefer strategic plans, slogans, and perhaps a tasteful committee structure. God gives us Christ crucified: foolishness to some, Paul says, but the power of God to those being saved.

Here's where this passage from Hebrews—our stewardship theme—helps us. John tells us to look up and live; Hebrews tells us where to keep looking as we keep going.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely,

and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.
(Hebrews 12:1-2)

That's the heart of it: Jesus endured the cross because joy was set before him. Not because suffering was good, easy, or pretty, but because beyond it lay creation reconciled, lost children gathered, nations healed, and the people of God made alive. Hebrews does not say, "Ignore the hard things." It says, "Look to Jesus."

So Christian life is not grim religious duty with better hymns. It is not spiritual dentistry: necessary, expensive, and vaguely dreaded. It is participation in the joy of Jesus. We lay aside every weight because some baggage keeps us from running and clings like Houston humidity. We run because Christ has already run ahead of us, through death into life.

Stewardship, then, is not merely about budgets, though budgets matter. We are not simply keeping the lights on, though in Houston we thank God daily for air conditioning. Stewardship is joy taking shape: children learning they are beloved, elders prayed for and visited, hungry neighbors fed, students welcomed, grief borne together, strangers becoming friends, worship turning our faces again toward the crucified and risen Lord.

Pledge cards are not the cross—please do not frame one and hang it over the sofa. And yes, bring yours back—no later than October 25! They invite a holy question: How might my life, gifts, habits, money, and imagination be drawn more deeply into Christ's compassion? Our pledges are one way we say yes to that joy together. Through them, Christ the King helps the weary look up and live.

Some of us will teach, sing, cook, count, greet, visit, advocate, or just show up when showing up is hard. Some will deepen their financial commitment; others will begin modestly. Some may ask whether comfort is one of the weights Hebrews advises us to lay aside.

This is not about guilt. Guilt can move people for about ten minutes, roughly the lifespan of a donut in confirmation class. Joy lasts longer.

The cross teaches that God's love is not cautious. God does not give from leftovers or wait until the risks are low. "God so loved the world." In Christ, God gives the very heart of God, lifted up for the life of the world. Our giving and serving are not dues paid to an institution; they are signs of resurrection life among us.

Psalm 98 says, "Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things." That is more than Cantor Ben's direction. We sing God's new song when we live as though the cross has conquered fear: making room for newcomers, forgiving old wounds, blessing our children, feeding and protecting our neighbors, and trusting God to use ordinary people, ordinary gifts, and even ordinary Thursday afternoons to proclaim grace.

Dear faithful people of Christ the King: Look to Jesus—the One lifted up, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, the One who endured the cross because joy was set before him. Then look around. Here is part of that joy: these people, this table, this font, this neighborhood, this mission. The race is set before us, but we do not run it alone. Led by Christ, surrounded by the saints before us and the faithful beside us, we are sustained by grace and summoned by joy. So let us lay aside whatever hinders and enter more deeply into the life of Christ, who gave himself for us and now gives us to one another for the life of the world. Amen.

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