

On Crucifixes

December 21, 1998 Paul Mc Cain

Q. Question: Is the use of crucifixes a Roman Catholic practice? Doesn't the empty cross provide a better symbol for Lutherans? How does the LCMS feel about using a crucifix in church? [Note: A crucifix is a cross with a statue of the crucified Christ on it].

A. A common misunderstanding among some Lutherans is the opinion that a crucifix, or the use of a crucifix, is a "Roman Catholic" practice. The history of Lutheranism demonstrates that the crucifix was a regular and routine feature of Lutheran worship and devotional life during Luther's lifetime and during the period of Lutheran Orthodoxy. It was also the case among the founding fathers of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. If you were to visit most of the original congregations of the LCMS here in the United States you would find lovely crucifixes adorning their altars, and in addition, beautiful statues on the altar of Christ and the four evangelists, or other such scenes. There is nothing uniquely Roman Catholic about this. Many Lutherans and Lutheran congregations use crucifixes. Crucifixes are used in the chapels of both of our seminaries.

Lutheranism has always considered the crucifix to be a powerful reminder of the sacrifice our Lord Jesus made for us and our salvation, on the cross. A crucifix vividly brings to mind the Apostle Paul's divinely inspired words, "We preach Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 1:23).

Interestingly enough, while there is certainly nothing "wrong" with an "empty" cross, the practice of using an "empty cross" on a Lutheran congregation's altar comes more from non-Lutheran sources. At the time of the Reformation there was conflict between Lutherans and Reformed Christians over the proper place of pictures, images, statues and the like in the church. Lutherans stood with historic Christendom in realizing that such art in the church was not wrong, and was a great aid for helping to focus devotional thoughts on the truths of the Word of God, no greater truth can be found than the death of Jesus Christ our Lord for the world's salvation.

The "empty cross" is not a symbol of Christ's resurrection, as some say, for the fact is that the cross would have been empty regardless of whether or not Christ had risen from the grave. The point to be kept clear here is that both an "empty cross" and a crucifix, symbolize the same thing: the death of Christ our Lord for the salvation of the world. Many feel that the crucifix symbolizes this truth more clearly and strikingly. That has been the traditional opinion of historic Lutheranism, until the last fifty years, due to the influence we will now mention.

Some Lutherans began to move away from crucifixes during the age of Lutheran Pietism, which rejected much of Lutheran doctrine and consequently many Lutheran worship practices. At the time, Lutheran Pietists, contrary to the clear position of Luther and the earlier Lutherans, held that symbols such as the crucifix were wrong. This was never the view of historic Lutheranism. Here in America, Lutherans have always felt a certain pressure to "fit in" with the Reformed Christianity that predominates much of the Protestant church here. Thus, for some Lutherans this meant doing away with things such as crucifixes, and vestments, and other traditional forms of Lutheran worship and piety. It is sad when some Lutherans are made to feel embarrassed about their Lutheranism by members of churches that teach the Word of God in error and who do not share Lutheranism's clear confession and practice of the full truth of the Word of God.

Lutheranism has always recognized that the use of any symbol (even the empty cross) can become an idolatrous practice, if in any way people are led to believe there is "power in the cross" or that a picture or representation of

a cross has some sort of ability, in itself, to bring us into relationship with Christ and His Gospel. Any of God’s good gifts can be turned against Him in this life and become an end in themselves.

Lutherans have never believed that banning or limiting proper artwork in the church is the way to prevent its improper use. Rather, we believe that proper teaching and right use is the best way, and the way that is in keeping with the gift of freedom we have in Christ to use all things to the glory and honour of God. Thus, many Lutherans use and enjoy the crucifix as a meaningful reminder of our Lord’s suffering and death. It might interest you to know that our Synod’s president has a beautiful crucifix adorning the wall of his office, constantly reminding him and visitors to his office of the great love of God that is ours in Christ Jesus our Lord.

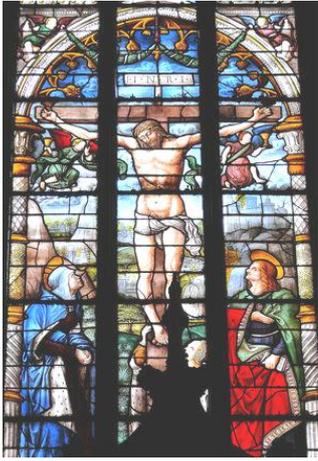
In short, and this is the most important point of all: there is nothing contrary to God’s Holy Word, or our Lutheran Confessions, about the proper use of the crucifix, just as there is nothing wrong with the proper use of an empty cross, or any other church symbol by which we are reminded of the great things God has done for us. We need to guard against quickly dismissing out of hand practices that we believe are “too Roman Catholic” before we more adequately explore their use and history in our own church.

In Christian freedom, we use either the crucifix or an empty cross and should not judge or condemn one another for using either or not using either symbol of our Lord’s sacrifice for our sins.

How Do We Understand Suffering Through a Theology of the Cross?

LOGIA October 29, 2015 By Adam Welton

THEOLOGY OF GLORY ^[4]	THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS
God is visible	God is hidden
Sight	Faith
Acceptable to human reason	Offensive to human reason
God works in power	God works in weakness
Human will is free	Human will is enslaved to sin
Righteousness is achieved doing the works of the law	Righteousness is a gift through faith in Christ alone
Characterized by either despair or arrogance	Characterized by the humility of confidence in Christ



Finally, the theology of glory is characterized by either despair or arrogance while the theology of the cross is characterized by the humility of confidence in Christ. Theologians of glory have abandoned hope in Christ for despair or arrogance in the self. The theology of glory finds only despair in suffering, for suffering brings the weakness and helplessness of man to the surface and strips away all illusions of power. Those who succumb to suffering must have had inadequate faith. God has abandoned them. God then ends up in one of two categories. God is either the creator of the world who does not break into time and space to help man,^[11] or there is no God. The theologian of glory finally has nothing to offer the one suffering.

The theologian of the cross sees God in weakness. St. Paul speaks comfort to all who are suffering in 2 Corinthians 12:7–10. St. Paul speaks the comfort which can only come from seeing God in the weakness of the cross, from knowing that God has suffered that we may be restored. A theologian of the cross finds confidence in the cross of Christ.

The world will never agree with the theologian of the cross who finds comfort in a man who has died on a cross. But those who are being saved by the cross finally find all of their comfort and confidence in the cross. It is here, in the theology of the cross, where the theologian has something to offer to those who are suffering.

Here we finally see the difference between a theologian of glory and a theologian of the cross in suffering. “A theology [Forde points out that the Latin literally says “theologian” rather than “theology”] of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology [theologian] of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.”^[20] The theologian of the cross just says suffering is suffering and there is not much we can do about it. Take the example of a man who is dying of cancer. The doctors have done everything they can do and there is nothing left to do. The theologian of glory smiles and tells the person and the family that things will be okay. The theologian of the cross says the man is dying. There is recognition the man is dying and we can do nothing. The theologian of the cross does not deny that God can and does work in miracles at times, but knows this is not the normal way God works. He does not look for a miracle where God has not promised one. When death is at hand the theologian of glory offers false hope in miracles while the theologian of the cross gives true hope in the forgiveness of sins and eternal life for the sake of Christ.

How then is suffering dealt with? Is suffering something which is simply to be avoided? Or is suffering to be expected and dealt with when it comes? The first is the way of the world and the way of the theologian of glory. The second is the way of the theologian of the cross and of Scriptures. Suffering is part of this life and this world because of the fall into sin.

Luther points us to a fourfold reason for suffering. These reasons are not the cause of the suffering but the good which comes from the suffering. Luther's answer to why God allows suffering is finally the good it brings to us. Luther points us to how suffering forms us to Christ (in Christ's suffering on the cross), how suffering is brought by the devil (because we believe in God), suffering helps to keep us from becoming secure in our sin (in the good times) and finally how Christian suffering is holy because it is suffering in Christ. Luther finally leads us to understand suffering not as evil but as necessary and good.

St. Matthew in the fourth chapter of his Gospel makes it clear that Jesus heals bodies and not just souls. A note in *The Lutheran Study Bible* explains this passage: “*healing*. The various diseases and afflictions cataloged in v. 24 are evidence of how sin has spoiled God's creation. Jesus' healing miracles showed the nearness of God's reign and gave a foretaste of our final deliverance from disease and death.”^[34] Earthly healing only goes to show us a little of what eternal life will be like. “For even if they are reborn and ‘renewed in the spirit of their minds’ [Eph. 4:23], this rebirth and renewal is not perfect in this world. Instead, it has only begun.”^[35] Where the Formula of

Concord speaks about the sanctification of a person it refers not only to our keeping the law but also has to the restoration of the body.

As we speak to people about healing we can tell them God may grant them healing as a foretaste of what is to come in paradise. We can also tell the person who has no hope of physical or mental healing that God has not abandoned them, but in the life to come they will be restored completely and no longer suffer. For St. John tells us in Revelation: “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4). We see here a complete reversal of the curse placed on Adam and Eve and all their descendants. We can now point those who seem to have no hope in this life to the hope which is to come.

This, you see, is the way we teach concerning suffering, and you should also accustom yourself to distinguish carefully between the suffering of Christ and all other suffering and know that his is a heavenly suffering and ours is worldly, that his suffering accomplishes everything, while ours does nothing except that we become conformed to Christ, and that therefore the suffering of Christ is the suffering of a lord, whereas ours is the suffering of a servant.^[40]

Understanding suffering comes from understanding the suffering of Christ on the cross. By our suffering we do not become more qualified for heaven. By Christ's suffering we are given forgiveness and eternal life. As we face suffering in this world we understand that we cannot avoid all suffering. When it comes, we know that in our suffering and weakness we see Christ. There we are lead to the foot of the cross to be forgiven and receive healing of this body which is a foretaste of what is to come in the next life. Finally, our hope is never in this life but in the life to come. As we suffer and we go to those who are suffering we bring the comfort of the life to come.

(This is a summary only, the full article can be found in the Logia Journal from the Luther Academy website)

[4] John T. Pless, Study Guide for: *On Being a Theologian of the Cross* by Gerhard Forde, distributed in PMM 150, 2–3.

[11] For a discussion of the implications of cold deism, see James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 52.

[20] Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, 81.

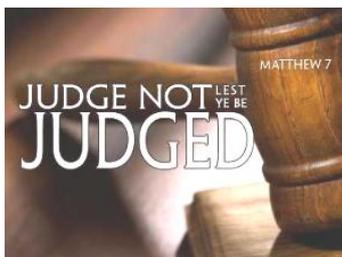
[34] Edward Engelbrecht and Paul E. Deterding, ed., *The Lutheran Study Bible: English Standard Version* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2009), 1585. Note on Matthew 4:23.

[35] FC EP VI, 4.

[40] LW 51:208.

The Goal of Judging is the Joy of Repentance

Pastor Karl Weber, “Steadfast Lutherans” Feb 2015



“Judge not that you be not judged. For with the judgement you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you” (Mt 7:1-2). Here are found those all-encompassing words from Jesus, “don’t judge!” – so we are told. To be sure we are not to judge pridefully, arrogantly, or with the desire to pound someone into the ground. For with that measure we in time will be judged. We are to judge a teaching and behaviour with the goal of lifting an individual from the place of their shame to the place of glory found in Jesus’ mercy.

Letting Scripture interpret Scripture we learn that Jesus encourages, commands and commends the loving kindness of judging. This is seen a few verses later in St. Matthew where Jesus says: “Beware of false prophets,

who come to you in Sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognise them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles?" (Matt. 7:15-16).

The fruit by which we recognise false and true prophets is not their lifestyle. Should we think false and true prophets are detected by their behaviour which is to say their good works we have veered into works righteousness. False and true prophets are known by the doctrinal facts they teach. Does the Pastor faithfully teach the Greatest Commandment addressing love of God, that is to say, doctrine (Matt 22:36-38)? Additionally, does the Pastor teach and preach in accord with Scripture on the Second Greatest Commandment which in our day is commonly referred to as morality: love of the neighbour (Matt 22:39)?

There are a number of places where Jesus wants us, encourages, yeah, commands us to judge. A few more would be [Jesus] answered them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather because the sky is red.' And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret [judge] the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret [judge] the signs of the times... "Watch and beware of [i.e., judge] the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (Matt 16:3,6). [Jesus] also said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, 'A shower is coming.' And so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat.' And it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?

"And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? (Lk 12:54-57).

"Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment" (Jn 7:24).

"For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?" (1Cor 5:12)

"Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try [judge] trivial cases?" (1Cor 6:2)

More examples can be cited but a fair reading of the text will see the point has been made.

Worldly love refuses to judge transgressions against either doctrine – sins against God addressed in the Greatest Commandment, or, false morality – sins against the neighbour as described in the Second Greatest Commandment. Love is not present when I turn a blind eye to my neighbour's experimentation with illegal drugs.

When something is not in accord with Scripture we are to lovingly judge our neighbour that through the Word the Holy Spirit move our friend toward what is of Jesus. Remember all false behaviour is grounded upon false doctrine. This turning away from sin and towards the truth of Jesus found in his Word is called repentance and is joyfully worked by the Holy Spirit through the Word.

Should we follow the world withholding judgment repentance is impossible. Upon repentance Jesus' forgiveness is delivered through Word and sacrament. In not judging we could be withholding Jesus' forgiveness from sinners. And so if we refuse to judge temporally in this life there is the possibility that a person may be judged eternally in the life to come for impenitence along with false teaching does not save.

The author of the blanket statement, "don't judge" is none other than Satan who does not want us to be able to protect ourselves from harm. This is not of Jesus who would have us kindly and gently judge doctrine and morality. True love will judge when need be and be lavished upon parishioners as well as teachers in the church. When we teach and live apart from who Jesus declared us to be in Baptism pray that the Holy Spirit who works through the Word and people who speak lead us to repentance that we eternally live in Jesus' mercy and forgiveness. Amen

Something from Luther: For the depressed

An excerpt from "The proper distinction between Law and Gospel" by C.F.W. Walther.

Luther wrote a letter to his dear friend who had fallen into melancholy, and refused to be comforted.

“Grace and peace from God in Christ and the consolations of the Holy Spirit to my worthy master in Christ, George Spalatin, superintendent of the churches in Misnia, most faithful pastor of Altenburg, my beloved in the Lord. Amen

“My dearest Spalatin, I heartily sympathize with you and earnestly pray our Lord Jesus Christ to strengthen you and give you a cheerful heart. I should like to know, and am making diligent enquiries to find out, what your trouble may be or what has caused your breakdown. I am told by some that it is nothing else than depression and heaviness of heart, caused by the matrimonial affair of a parson who was publicly united in marriage to the stepmother of his deceased wife. If this is true, I beseech you most urgently not to become self centered and heed the thoughts and sensations of your own heart, but listen to me, your brother, who is speaking to you in the name of Christ. Otherwise your despondency will grow beyond endurance and kill you; for St. Paul says, 2Cor. 7:10: ‘The sorrow of the world worketh death.’ I have often passed through the same experience and witnessed the same in 1540, in the case of Magister Philip, who was nearly consumed by heaviness of heart and despondency on account of the landgrave’s affair. However, Christ used my tongue to raise him up again. I say this on the supposition that you have sinned and are partly to blame for the aforementioned marriage, because you approved it.”

“Yea, I shall go further and say: Even if you had committed more numerous and grievous sins in this present and other instances than Manasseh, the king of Judah, whose offences and crimes could not be eradicated throughout his posterity down to the time when Jerusalem was destroyed, while your offense is very light, because it concerns a temporal interest and can be easily remedied; nevertheless, I repeat it, granted you are to blame, are you going to worry yourself to death over it and by thus killing yourself commit a still more horrible sin against God?”

“It is bad enough to know that you made a mistake in this matter. Now do not let your sin stick in your mind, get rid of it. Quit your despondency, which is a far greater sin. Listen to the blessed consolation which the Lord offers you by the prophet Ezekiel, who says, chap. 33:11: ‘As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.’ Do you imagine that only in your case the Lord’s hand is shortened? Is.59:1. Or has He in your case alone forgotten to be gracious and shut up His tender mercies? Ps. 77:10. Or are you the first man to aggravate his sin so awfully that henceforth there is no longer a High Priest who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities? Heb. 4:15. Do you consider it a new marvel when a person living this life in the flesh, with innumerable arrows of so many devils flying about him, is occasionally wounded and laid prostrate?”

“It seems to me, my dear Spalatin, that you have still but a limited experience in battling against sin, an evil conscience, the Law, and the terrors of death. Or Satan has removed from your vision and memory every consolation which you have read in the Scriptures. In days when you were not afflicted, you were well fortified and knew very well what the office and benefits of Christ are. To be sure, the devil has now plucked from your heart all the beautiful Christian sermons concerning the grace and mercy of God in Christ by which you used to teach, admonish, and comfort others with a cheerful spirit and a great, buoyant courage. Or it must surely be that heretofore you have been only a trifling sinner, conscious only of paltry and insignificant faults and frailties.”

“Therefore my faithful request and admonition is that you join our company and associate with us, who are real, great, and hard-boiled sinners. You must by no means make Christ to seem paltry and stifling to us, as though He could be our Helper only when we want to be rid from imaginary, nominal, and childish sins. No, no! That would not be good for us. He must rather be a Saviour and Redeemer from real, great, grievous, and damnable transgressions and iniquities, yea, from all sins added together in a grand total.”

“Dr. Staupitz comforted me on a certain occasion when I was a patient in the same hospital and suffering the same affliction as you, by addressing me thus: Aha! You want to be a painted sinner and, accordingly, expect to have in Christ a painted Saviour. You will have to get used to the belief that Christ is a real Saviour and you are a real sinner. For God is neither jesting nor dealing in imaginary affairs, but He was greatly and most assuredly in earnest when He sent His own Son into the world and sacrificed Him for our sakes, etc. Rom.8:32; John 3:16. These and similar reflections, drawn from consolatory Bible-texts, have been snatched from your memory by the accursed Satan, and hence you cannot recall them in your present great anguish and despondency. For God’s

sake, then, turn your ears hither, brother, and hear me cheerfully singing – me, your brother, who at this time is not afflicted with the despondency and melancholy that is oppressing you and is therefore strong in faith, so that you, who are weak and harried and harassed by the devil, can lean on him for support until you have regained your old strength, can bid defiance to the devil, and cheerfully sing: ‘Thou hast thrust sore at me that I might fall; but the Lord helped me.’ Ps.118:13. Imagine now that I am Peter holding out my hand to you and saying to you: ‘In the name of Jesus Christ, rise up and walk.’ Acts 3:6. For I know I am not mistaken, nor is the devil talking through me; but since I am laying the Word of Christ before you, it is Christ who speaks to you through me and bids you obey and trust your brother who speaks to you through me and bids you obey and trust your brother who is of the same household of faith. It is Christ that absolves you from this and all your sins, and I am partaker of your sin by helping you to bear up under it.”

“See that you accept and appropriate to yourself the comfort I am offering you; for it is true, certain, and reliable, since the Lord has commanded me to communicate it to you and bidden you to accept it from me. For if I am cut to the quick by seeing you in such awful distress because of your deep melancholy, it gives God a far greater displeasure to behold it; for ‘He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth Him of the evil.’ Joel 2:13. Therefore do not turn away from him who is coming to comfort you and announce the will of God to you and who hates and abominates your despondency and melancholy as a plague of Satan. Do not by any means permit the devil to portray Christ to you differently from what He is in truth. Believe the Scripture, that testifies that He ‘was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil.’ 1John 3:8. Your melancholy is a work of the devil, which Christ wants to destroy if you will only let Him. You have had your fill of anguish; you have sorrowed enough; you have exceeded your penance. Therefore, do not refuse my consolation; let me help you. Behold my faithful heart, dear Spalatin, in dealing with you and speaking to you. I shall consider it the greatest favour that I have ever received from you if you allow the comfort which I am offering you, or rather the absolution, pardon, and restoration of the Lord Christ, to abide in you. If you do this, you will, after your recovery, be forced to confess yourself that you have offered the most pleasing and acceptable sacrifice to the Lord by your obedience; for Ps.147:11 it is written: ‘The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear Him, in those that hope in His mercy’; again, in Ps.34:18: ‘The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart and saveth such as are of a contrite spirit’; and in Ps. 51:17: ‘The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise’. Therefore let the accursed devil with his despondency scamper away like a whipped dog. He wants to make me sad on your account; he wants to blast my joy in the Lord; yea, if he could, he would swallow us all up at one gulp. May Christ, our Lord, rebuke and chastise him, and may He strengthen, comfort, and preserve you by His Spirit! Amen. Comfort your wife with these and your own more effectual words. I have not the leisure to write also to her.

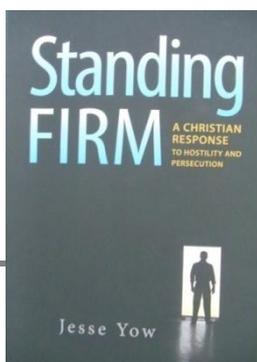
Given at Zeitz, August 21, A.D. 1544. Your Martin Luther.”

Standing Firm

We live in the world but not of the world, and people can see this. God calls us to be faithful, and faithful individuals as well as groups of Christians can have a disproportionately large impact wherever they live. Our level of understanding may not be as complete as we would like, and we can rarely see the whole picture. Seeing the situation from God’s point of view, though, starts to give us a sense of that larger picture and sets the stage for us to serve Him as we consider how to respond to hostility.

We may ask, “Why do we encounter hostility?” But it may be more useful to ask, “How would God like to use us in hostile circumstances?” The first question can lapse into a “Why me?” kind of whining, but the second question is more unsettling because it suggests that God, who loves us, permits us to suffer. It is unsettling because it implies that our comfort might not be the most important consideration in God’s plans, and because it hints that God has allowed or may even have caused our discomfort. The only real answer to being unsettled, though, is to be settled in faith in God.

We cannot second-guess the mind of God, but several possibilities might help explain God’s intentions for our difficulties: Our discomfort, even our suffering, might be part of a larger witness to neighbours to help them learn of God’s justice, love, and forgiveness. Our discomfort might be related to God pushing us out of our situational or geographic comfort zone, moving us into situations or locations where He would like to put our time, energy, and witness to use. Our discomfort could be linked to God’s desire to smooth off our rebellious rough spots, discipline us, shape us, and grow us in



godliness, love and dependence upon Him. Ultimately, we must see that our discomfort is part of following in the footsteps of Christ: Jesus came to a hostile world bearing God's love and was crucified. He knew that this would happen; the sacrifice of Christ was God's plan all along. Now He chooses to allow each of us to serve as a little Christ (or Christian) to bear God's love to this hostile world. We take up our cross to fulfil this lovingly sacrificial role, and our response to hostility is indeed rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. (*"A Christian Response To hostility And Persecution"* page 118)

Note from Pastor Ziebell: 4 out of the 5 ULMA congregations have voted for fellowship with the AELC. The one congregation that hasn't are doing so within the next few weeks. The ULMA conference has given Pastor William Mack the task to draw up a letter officially declaring their fellowship with the AELC. Please pray for God's blessings to rest upon the ULMA & AELC, that together we will continue to preach repentance and forgiveness to the world.

Note from Pastor Owen. Good Shepherd Tin Can Bay's final Service will be held on January 17th 2016. The congregation wishes to thank you for your great support over the last 5 years. Unfortunately due to work considerations they cannot continue where they are and are having to sell up and move on. They are looking forward to moving closer to us and joining in our worship celebrations here. TCB also invite anyone who would like to join them in their last Service in January are welcome.

Pastor's Scones

Pastor Ohlson's favourite recipe

Ingredients:

8 ounces wholemeal or white S.R. flour
½ teaspoon salt
3 rounded desert spoons full cream pwd. milk
1 tablespoon butter (marg.)
¾ cup water
About cup grated cheese
Small onion or half medium finely chopped

Method:

Rub butter into flour, milk and salt mixture.
Add cheese and onion (lightly mix in).
Make into soft dough with water.
Turn onto floured board, cut ¾" or thicker,
glaze with milk

Bake:

Hot oven 220C 12-15 minutes until golden



ALSO MAKES a GOOD DAMPER:

Add whatever you like e.g. Olives, sprinkle of mixed herbs, slices cheese, tomato etc on top.