

It's not about me (John 1:29-42)

## Great preaching always points to Jesus.

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With an oversized finger John the Baptist points at Jesus on the cross in [Matthias Grünewald's Isenheim altarpiece](#).

Of course, John was beheaded long before Jesus was crucified, so the work is surreal, in a Late Medieval sense. John seems to be saying, "It's not about me." And then: "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," a passage which many Christians sing every Sunday as a part of the communion liturgy.

The same can be seen in [Lucas Cranach's portrait of Luther preaching and pointing to the cross](#) (also from an altarpiece, in Wittenberg, Germany). It's about Jesus and the cross. *Crux sola est nostra theologia*, Luther said. "The cross is our only theology."

Creation reveals God. Beauty reveals God. This is most certainly true. But our picture of the world is incomplete if we don't contend with the pervasive presence of evil in our world. Our picture is incomplete without an eyes-wide-open view of suffering, hatred, and violence in the world. We must tell the truth about the world.

"A theologian of the cross calls a thing what it is," says Luther in the Heidelberg Disputation. The cross tells the truth about the world. It is a truth we must hear if we are to avoid a bankrupt, rose-colored-glasses theology.

I once walked into a “Christian” bookstore. In the gifts section were some boxes. On the boxes it said, “Something nice for you.” Inside was a tortured man who had been nailed to a cross.

Something nice for you. The cross stands for the world as a sign that God stands with the victim, not the victor. It is a powerful symbol that we have robbed of its impact.

Paul says the cross is a *scandalon*. The word is often translated “stumbling block,” but it is the word from which we get our word “scandal.” Origen referred to Jesus’ death as the *mors turpissima crucis*: the utterly vile death of the cross. The cross has power because it tells the truth about the world.

Great preaching always points to the cross. It’s about him. Great preaching reminds us that God is revealed in the hungry, naked, sick, and imprisoned. It points to the one who said, “Whatever you do the least of these, you do unto me.”

As we turn our gaze to the crucified people of our world today, we get a glimpse of what and who God cares about. Jesus takes away the sin of the world by revealing the sin of the world—by casting a spotlight on it. If we could just remember that. We need Easter, but as long as we live in this world, we also need Good Friday.

Every Sunday we are John the Baptist: “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”