Sermon for Mid-Week Lenten Service 5 or Good Friday

# The Text: John 19:18

# They Crucified Him

Dear followers to the cross,

They crucified Him. Most thought that was the tragic end of the matter. He would be recorded by the Romans as a failed revolutionary, though Pilate didn’t see Him as any great political threat. His own followers would lament Him as the one who they thought would restore Israel to independence and glory. So there He was, hanging between two criminals on public display: A pathetic and stomach-turning sight. The dirty deed was done, and hope seemed lost.

Soon to come was the darkness (explained by naturalists as an eclipse of the sun), and then the earthquake. The same explanation was offered, but the centurion on duty was still roused to a confession, *“Truly this man was the Son of God!”1* The customary precautionary measures were taken before the bodies were removed. The soldiers did not find it necessary to break Jesus’ legs. They only pierced His side with a spear. What would one last wound matter for a man who was to be forever entombed?

Lent rehearses these events not only for the purpose of revising our knowledge, but for renewing our faith. Calvary, Golgotha, the Hill of the Skull, was not an end for Christ, but for Satan. The angel of darkness would, himself, fall into shadow. He would reel under the specter of the cross. It ***was*** necessary to lay the body of the sin-bearer in a tomb, so that the power of sin to entomb could be laid to rest, so that the power of Satan to accuse could be consigned to the grave.

The Christian cannot escape identification with the crucifixion- that messy, bloody, politically incorrect business- it is an inescapable distinctive of our persona in Christ. And don’t think for a moment that it’s not politically incorrect even in many so- called religious and Christian circles. The whole idea of blood sacrifice and substitution is thought to be draconian and uncivilized. “Enlightened” ideologues press upon us a sanitized theory of love and tolerance achieved by human agreement and sensitivity. To achieve any measure of plausibility it requires an emasculation of sin and a ‘humanization’ of grace. Sin becomes nothing more than poor choices made by uninformed individuals. Grace is little more than the inalienable right to pursue happiness on one’s own terms. It’s like building artistic sandcastles on the beach on a perfect sunny day while a storm looms on the horizon. Sandcastles will provide no refuge.

Dear friends, it’s hardly credible that Christ, the holy Son of God, would have shed His blood under those circumstances. The reality of evil is so profound it cannot be proven to anyone by tangible means. Yes, we are first-hand witnesses to wicked intent, scandalous and deceitful words, and immoral and malicious deeds. We feel our own faults, foibles, and flaws. We observe them in others. We harm and are harmed. We cause pain to others and endure pain from them. Still, we are called upon to take it on faith that the entire situation is unresolvable and irredeemable apart from the merciful intervention of the Almighty.

Faith sees that the One being held up by a rough-hewn assemblage of wood is Himself holding up the universe. He whose body collapsed with that final breath is the One who breathed life into the soul of the first body. The One who was sinless died as the greatest sinner. Why could Jesus not just have suffered, but still lived? Why was there need for a resurrection? Because without a death the sacrifice was not complete and there would have been no finality to the Father’s plan. Human souls are not of such little value that redemption could be cheap. The crucifixion is an indication of what it means that Adam and Eve were created in God’s image and likeness2.

Lent is a time of going forward by revisiting origins. Living water is sourced from only one well. The only way we can be empowered to live our faith is to keep returning to the source. We return to Christ, His word, His promises, His forgiveness, His sacraments. There is no power, strength or refuge in the law. There is no aid in human might or ingenuity. And though we will get no appreciation from the world for living our faith, we do have the promise the Holy Spirit will never be taken from us. The Scripture says, *“The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make people holy through His own blood. Let us, then, go out to Him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace He bore. For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.”3*

People who thought they could keep finding God in Jerusalem were mistaken. The curtain of the temple was rent in two4. Christ fulfilled the old covenant. God is found where His means of grace are administered, where the gospel is proclaimed, where baptismal waters flow, where His body and blood is consecrated. God is present with, in, and among His people wherever two or three are gathered5. Christ is our only place of safety. He is our only place of rest.

And so, we are mistaken if we look for hope and comfort in the wrong places in this world. We have no enduring city here. That is not what living our faith is about. We are pilgrims in this life living sacrificially for others. We live our faith both inwardly and outwardly. Regarding the inner activity, Luther writes, “The life of a holy person consists more in taking from God than in giving, more in desiring than in having, more in becoming pious than in being pious; as St. Augustine says: Faith acquires what the Law requires. For this reason, asking and seeking constitute the real mode of life of the inner man.”6 Regarding the outward expression, the Scriptures says, *“Let us continually offer to God, a sacrifice of praise- the fruit of lips that confess His name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”7* We can do so without fear, even enduring personal loss. There is nothing that we might forfeit that God can’t furnish in abundance. The apostle says, *“He who did not spare His Own Son, but gave Him up for us all- how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?”8*

They crucified Him. The worst thing imaginable, was, for us, the greatest plan ever conceived. Amen.

1 Mark 15:39

2 See Genesis 1:26

3 Hebrews 13:11-14

4 Matthew 27:51

5 See Matthew 18:20

6 Martin Luther, *Anthology* #697

7 Hebrews 13:15-16

8 Romans 8:32