

Pastor Kenneth Mars

Immanuel Lutheran Church – Burns, WY (dual parish w/St. John's, Kimball, NE)

Good Friday (ABC)

April 14, 2017

Text: John 19:25–27; Romans 5:8

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Thus says the Lord, “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). The annual commemoration of Christ’s death on the cross – Good Friday – is a commemoration of divine, holy love. God shows His love for us in the death of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The mood and tone of this service is, to be sure, solemn. But it is, nonetheless, a deep and joyful celebration of God the Father’s love revealed in the death of His Son.

Last night, we commemorated the feast of divine, holy love: the Lord’s Supper. In that holy meal, Christ Jesus gives and sheds His love for us in His holy body and blood. That divine love gives us the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. We share that love with one another by receiving the same holy body and blood. Having been thus loved by God and each other, we manifest that greatest of all virtues in caring for one another in any number of ways. Love always leads to action.

Jesus loves and gives His body and sheds His blood into death and resurrection so that we can receive it often as our highest treasure and greatest good. God the Father loves and gives His beloved Son unto death so that the sins of the world can forever be taken away. God the Holy Spirit loves us by quickening and kindling divine faith and love in our hearts and minds through the preaching of the Gospel. It is by the grace and love of the Holy Spirit that we cry out to God, “Abba, Father!” The Holy Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are adopted children of God. Yes, dear saints of God, Good Friday is a commemoration of divine, holy love. For God is passionately determined to bring you unto Himself today, tomorrow, and for all eternity.

“Oh, what a subject! It contains the most glorious, the greatest of all miracles of God’s love, the most blessed and deepest of all revealed mysteries of grace...After God let His own Son bleed and die on the cross, no man can doubt that God will receive him if he but returns. Or what is there that could still fill him with fear? His sins? They are paid for by an infinite price, the blood of God’s Son. Or God’s wrath?

Why, He is reconciled through the death of His own Son. Or God's threats in the Law? Why, they are done away with by the cross, transformed into promises of grace and happiness. As certainly as at Christ's death the sun was darkened, so certainly has the sun of grace and righteousness risen over all men. As certainly as after Christ's death the graves were opened and the dead arose, so certainly was Christ's death the death of our death, and the well of water springing up to eternal life. As certainly as at Christ's death the rocks were rent, so certainly did God's own hand tear away the handwriting of the guilt of all men...God is reconciled, gloriously, completely, eternally reconciled...

If the love that drove God's Son to the cross does not drive (mankind) to God, what can drive him?...Just think—God does not need you, and still from eternity He longed to draw you to Himself and save you. He foresaw your fall; that is why He decided in advance to redeem and reconcile you with Himself" (C.F.W. Walther, *Gospel Sermons*, vol. 1, p. 220, 222). This is the kind of determined, self-giving, self-sacrificing love that Jesus demonstrated to the world when He died for us sinners.

As so we, the redeemed of the Lord, forever cling to the preaching of Christ crucified and resurrected for our justification. For in that Jesus, we find His love for us. A love that worked, suffered, and endured all things to save His beloved.

Did we not see this divine love in action on the cross in John's Passion account? Mary the mother of Jesus was at the cross along with her sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus knew that His time of suffering had come to its completion, He committed His mother into the care of "the disciple whom he loved." John, the beloved disciple, was also there at the cross; Mary is placed into John's care. Jesus is doing more here than simply providing for the rest of her earthly life. He is loving her unto salvation by committing her temporal and eternal well-being to His Church.

For John is an apostle. Upon His apostolic witness to Christ's death and resurrection, the love of God will be preached and proclaimed to Mary, her sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, Mary Magdalene, and to as many as the Lord our God shall call unto Himself in faith and salvation. In this holy, Christian Church, Christ's love for the world will continue as His beloved people are nourished by the preaching and teaching of His cross, by the absolution won in His death and resurrection, and by His body and blood which His people will receive often.

Jesus committing Mary to the care of the apostle John is a picture of Christ's new family. Jesus loves His people by placing them under the continual Word and Sacramental care of His cross and resurrection given through the Lord's apostolic ministry. (thanks to Herman Ridderbos for this insight, *Gospel of John*, p. 613-614).

Dear beloved saints of Jesus, "the cross of your Reconciler (is) your sanctuary in the agony of sin, your hope's anchor in affliction, your victory banner in the battle with sin, world, Satan, (and it is) your heavenly ladder in the hour of death. (This) divine certainty of your reconciliation with God will recast your heart. Love to God and your brother will enter in. You (can now cry out) in words and deeds, 'I will love Him because He first loved me'" (C.F.W. Walther, *Gospel Sermons*, vol. 1, p. 225) in the cross of His Son, my Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus says the Lord, "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

Dear Father in heaven, your love was revealed in the death of Your Son on the cross. Fill our hearts this night with the zeal to receive Your love in the preaching of Christ's Cross so that we may love You above all things and love our neighbors as ourselves. For Your glory and the good of all people unto eternal life...

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.