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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Good Friday

April 18, 2014

Text: Isaiah 53:2–5, 11

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

It's Good Friday, the second day of the Triduum, the three days leading up to Easter morning. Isn't it somewhat odd that we call today good? Jesus was unjustly and cruelly mocked, beaten, whipped, and crucified unto death. By all accounts, Jesus' death was anything but good. There were a few mourners at the cross but even there, on Calvary's hill, our Lord's enemies tormented Him with mockery. Where's the good in all that?

The events associated with our Lord's Good Friday are messy. Many Christians ignore Good Friday. There are no cultural traditions associated with Jesus' death. Easter has Easter bunnies, painted eggs, lilies, pretty spring dresses, and so forth. Good Friday lacks all the cultural and commercial accoutrements. Too many think of today as a somber, dreary funeral service. At the front of tonight's bulletin, I include this statement, "The Good Friday service reflects the complementary nature of repentance over sin, and the joy and praise the Church expresses because of the salvation won by Jesus' death on Calvary's cross. To that end, Good Friday must never be seen as an annual funeral service for Jesus..."

Good Friday is good because "Jesus' death reveals the enormity of our sins but it also reveals the infinite depths of God's love for the world. Thus, we say, 'Behold the life-giving cross.'" Tonight is not a celebration of death but a deep, reverential reflection and commemoration of life and divine, steadfast love manifested in the crucified, resurrected Lord Jesus Christ.

Consider the life of our Lord as described by the prophet Isaiah, who oftentimes provides more detail about Jesus than Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. According to Isaiah 53:2, Jesus "grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him" (vs. 2). During the days of our Lord's earthly life, He was as plain and ordinary looking as any other Jewish man. He was no superstar, attractive in form or appearance. He was simply Jesus, the son of Joseph and Mary.

Mark's gospel says the people of Nazareth were utterly dumbfounded when Jesus began His public ministry. They said, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him." Good Friday reminds us that the ordinary Son of Mary, who was raised and lived in an ordinary family in an ordinary 1<sup>st</sup> century village, was also the majestic, transcendent Son of God the Father. Good Friday proclaims that there's more to Jesus than what meets the eye.

That extraordinary ordinariness is what led to our Lord being rejected and scorned by men. Again Isaiah, "He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not" (53:3). Good Friday reminds us of the manly courage and strength Jesus possessed as He faced divine and human rejection.

Isaiah continues, "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed" (53:4-5). On Good Friday the Father strikes His beloved Son so that our transgressions and iniquities can be forever wiped away in sacrificial love and grace. Jesus bore our suffering and endured the stripes of our punishment. In turn, He gives us bodily healing that will be perfected in the resurrection on the Last Day.

To be sure, Good Friday does remind us about the enormity of our sin as well as the super-abounding enormity of God's love and desire to save His people. We must never think of sin as simply a weakness, a "mistake", a physical or mental disposition, as we are used to hearing nowadays. To think thus would cheapen the Lord's sacrificial love. The Lord created us for better, more noble things than the cheap imitations of evil and corruption.

Isaiah boldly declares this about Jesus, "Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities" (53:11). Because of the messiness of Jesus' Passion and Good Friday crucifixion, we are accounted righteous before God the Father. In Jesus, you are everything God the Father wants you to be. That's the miracle of Good Friday.

The wonder and marvel of Good Friday is that in the midst of so much evil – the pure, sinless Son of God suffering for sins not His own – the greatest good comes to humanity: forgiveness, grace, eternal life, and victory over sin, death, and the devil. Everything that was lost because of Adam and Eve’s first sin is restored. Your destiny as God’s created child is fulfilled in Jesus’ Good Friday death and Easter resurrection. Each year we are reminded of our Lord’s last triumphant cry recorded in John’s gospel, “It is finished!” All that Jesus was, and is, and ever shall be, is given. It’s finished! There’s nothing more that need be done; nothing more that need be given. In Jesus, you stand perfect and whole. It is finished!

Tonight is the celebration of our Lord’s triumph as well as our victory over sin, death, and the devil. And so we declare boldly and triumphantly, “Behold the life-giving cross.”

✠ 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.