

Sermon – Good Friday (04/15/22)

Text – Isaiah 53:6-8

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a Lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken.

Theme – “Led to the Slaughter”

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

This Lenten season we have been talking about the lambs and sheep and even goats who point us to Christ, who truly IS the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Today, though, we see what that means. We see what it cost Him. We see the depth of His love, His devotion, His sacrifice. For sinners like you and me. Today we see that Lamb led away to the slaughter. To the cross and the shedding of His holy, precious blood. To the death which alone can pay for the sin of the human race.

(pause)

How quickly things change! Just five days ago we were gathered here in a mood of celebration, of triumph, of glory as we remembered the pomp of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem as King. On Palm Sunday, it seemed as if everyone loved Jesus -- the streets were overflowing with Jewish pilgrims shouting: “*Hosanna! Hosanna to the King of Israel!*” The frenzy and enthusiasm of the crowd scared the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders so much that they feared the Roman soldiers would have to come to put down a full-scale rebellion.

But now, on Good Friday, it is the very opposite: no apparent celebration, triumph, or glory. No crowd proclaiming Jesus as King. No hosannas. Just the fading echoes of the same Jewish crowd now

screaming for Jesus' blood. Just the memory of the former King struggling to carry the weight of His own cross, after being beaten and tortured and ridiculed for hour after hour by the Jewish leaders, the Roman governor, the Galilean king, and their soldiers. Just the sound of hammer blows driving large spikes into the agonized flesh of Jesus' hands and feet. Just the sights and sounds of a Man being executed -- slowly, painfully -- on the cross. (pause)

Oftentimes a preacher will give his listeners a descriptive account of what a crucifixion was like, detailing for the congregation the horrors, the agonies, the slowness of this particular method of execution. And that is all true -- to die on a cross is one of THE most terrible of all forms of capital punishment ever devised by man. But as real and as fearful as those sufferings certainly are, they cannot be the real focus for us as we look at the cross of Christ today. After all, there have been thousands of people who have died on a cross throughout history -- in fact, even today Christians are sometimes martyred on crosses in countries (such as in the Muslim world) where Christianity is persecuted. No, the simple fact that this Man -- Jesus, called the Christ, the King of the Jews -- was executed using this particular form of punishment is NOT what matters. It is not merely His physical sufferings that make this Friday "Good". No, it goes much deeper than that.

What makes the events of that day, on the mount of Calvary, nearly 2000 years ago, so important that we cannot even begin to understand their depth is summarized for us by the apostle John, when he writes: "*The Jews insisted, 'We have a Law, and according to that Law He must die, because He claimed to be the Son of God.'*" (pause)

There it is. According to the Law, Jesus must die because He claimed to be the Son of God. Because Jesus is the Son of God, He had to die as the Law demands. And this death is not just physical, but -- infinitely more -- He had to die the spiritual death that sin demands. It is that suffering of hell itself on the cross -- in your place and mine -- that makes this day **Good** Friday. For that should be you, that

should be me, up there on that cross -- suffering the hatred and rejection from every living creature (and from God Himself) because of our sin. But it is not. Instead it is JESUS who endures all that because He is exactly who He claimed to be: the Son of God, our King, and our Savior.

On Palm Sunday the crowds hailed Jesus as King, as the Son of David come to rescue them. That is what "hosanna" means -- "*save us*". But His Kingship was not the type that they had expected, nor the kind they wanted. Between Palm Sunday's Triumphal Entry and Good Friday's desertion and condemnation, the crowd realized that they had misjudged Jesus; or better, they had misjudged His mission. The King who suffers and dies for His people was NOT what they wanted and so they rejected Jesus, calling for His death. There's a famous saying that goes: "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned" -- well, the truth is that hell hath no fury like sinful hearts disappointed. The crowd turned on Jesus in a most vicious and frightening way. But before we condemn the Jews who exchanged their "Hosannas" for shouts of "Crucify Him!", we must remember that if we had been there, we would have shouted just as loudly for the same thing. That's what it is like to be a sinner. It so perverts us that we reject the very One who has come to save us!

And save us He did. St. Paul tells us that Jesus literally *became* sin for us on the cross. Jesus, the King, the Son of God, who was free of original sin and who never sinned in His entire life, for us and for our salvation, became sin itself. In Jesus, then, every sin of the entire human race came to rest. On that cross hung the very essence of sin. And what is that sin deserves? As the Jews were quick to point out, the Law tells us that sin demands the punishment of death: both physical and spiritual death.

In Matthew's Gospel are these words, which never fail to frighten and amaze me: "*About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice: 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' -- which means, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?'*" Those are words literally spoken from the very depths of hell itself. In those words we hear the anguished cries of the Son of God to His own Father, cries that go

unanswered because all the wrath of God has been poured out upon the Son. **I** should be the one uttering those words of pain and rejection, the words of hellish torment -- I am the one who has sinned. And yet it is not me but Jesus who suffers and endures my punishment!

Just as the crowd turned its back on Jesus, so too God the Father turns away from His own Son, for my sake and for yours! Because Jesus was who He claimed to be -- the Son of God -- He went to the cross as the King who serves, who saves, His people. In Jesus, all sin has been forever dealt with, there is nothing left for you or me to do to complete what He did that day at Calvary. As Jesus Himself said, just before He gave up His spirit: *"It is finished!"* By those words Jesus wasn't just saying that His life was about to end, that He knew His time was up. No, He was making one last proclamation of the Gospel -- that by His innocent, bitter sufferings and death for us He has done everything to reconcile mankind to God. His work, His mission, His redemption of the whole human race has been accomplished. It *is* finished!

And it is for that reason that we can call this Good Friday. It is Good because once and for all, sin has been carried for us by the One who is truly our King, the Son of God who took on our flesh, the One who bore our sin for us, Jesus the Christ. (pause)

All that is what we must see when we look at the cross. Pilate said to the crowd that day: *"Here is your King!"* But the Jews replied: *"Take Him away! Take Him away! Crucify Him!"* In those words, the people refused the One who really is King, and they rejected all He came to give them.

Today, the Holy Spirit is saying those same words to you that Pontius Pilate directed to the mob: *"Here is your King!"* Whenever we hear the Gospel message, the Spirit is saying those very words to us. Do we respond like the Jews? Do we say: *"Take Him away"*? Most likely we would say "no", that we do not reject Jesus or cast Him aside. But is that really so?

Every time we give in to sin, every time we let the devil have his way, every time we look for a King more in line with the world's expectations (or our own) we deny Jesus and say, in effect, "*Away with Him! Crucify Him!*" It shames me, it pains me, to think of just how often I have done that very thing in just the past few days. Like the Jews, I too have gone from "Hosanna" on Palm Sunday, to "*Take Him away! Crucify Him!*" today. I know just how sinful I am; I cannot hide my sins from myself, even if I can somehow manage to hide them from others. Likewise, you know your sins. And today, more than any other day, we are forced to confront the consequences of those sins -- consequences borne, not by us, but by Jesus FOR us. (pause)

I have told people through the years that writing a sermon for Good Friday is easier than almost any other sermon. That's because it is hard for a Christian to really look at the cross and lose focus. The trouble comes for us when we stop looking at the cross and let our attention be drawn elsewhere. The devil knows that, better than we do. And so he is constantly trying to get us to lose sight of the cross and of our crucified King. We need to hear the Holy Spirit say to us, again and again, "***Here is your King!***"

Here indeed IS our King. Our King on the cross. Our King who loves us so much that He willingly became sin for us, that He willingly laid down His life for us, that He willingly took our punishment for us, so that we might enjoy the heaven which He has won. Here is our King who was rejected and hated by mankind. Our King who was forsaken by His heavenly Father. Our King, who in dying the death of the cross, did the work that only He could do, the work which saves us. (pause)

A most curious day, this fearful and dreadful day we call Good Friday. A day that we can never fully understand; a sacrifice we can only begin to appreciate; a King we can recognize and confess only by the work of the Holy Spirit. But on this day, we come face to face with our sin and its results. On this day we see the inescapable conclusion that "*the wages of sin is death*".

But, because our God is merciful and love, that death is not OURS, but His! He is led away to the slaughter, to the hell, of the cross. Look, then, at that cross, see your King, believe Him when He groans "*It is finished*" and live. Live in Him. Live in His sacrifice. Live in His grace. Live in His love. Live in His Life-Giving wounds. Live in the sin-cleansing flood that flows from His head, His hands, His side -- the blood that washed you in baptism, the blood which you drink in His Holy Supper. And all of that, for you and your salvation! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

OS: Offertory/Offering

FE: Offertory/Prayers