

## Good Friday Sermon

Dear brothers and sisters, tonight we continue with our observance of Jesus' Ordeal, his death and resurrection, which is the center of our faith and life as people of God and followers of Jesus. Jesus' ordeal, his betrayal, trial, suffering and death, are his Passover from death to life, and the resurrection becomes the down payment on that promise of new life that God has promised. With Christ risen from the grave, we can trust in God's intentions for us and for the world God created. With Christ risen from the dead, God owns the future, and we can trust God's future. God's will is to save, and the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ both saves us and shows us who God is.

Maundy Thurs – we remembered that the meal Jesus established for his disciples and for his church carries us over from death into life, like the Passover of the Israelites. In that Passover, Israel was redeemed from bondage and given freedom, and in further confirmation of that truth, all people are redeemed from bondage and given freedom through Christ's Passover from death to life.

Good Friday presents us with the problem of suffering.

Throughout the New Testament, we hear that Jesus is God, and therefore, that Jesus' suffering is God's suffering. Jesus warns his disciples about the ordeal that is coming, which the Son of Man must endure. He teaches about the rejection of the vineyard owner's son in parables. And in the theology of the early church, we understand that Jesus is called Immanuel, a name that literally means, God with us. So when Jesus suffers, God suffers; when Jesus is rejected, God is rejected; when Jesus dies, God dies; and when Jesus rises from the grave, it is proof that God is God, that there is no God besides God, and that whatever happens in this broken relationship between humans and God, it will happen the way God wants it to happen.

IN this way, in knowing who Jesus really is, we can understand how Jesus's suffering could be said to bring us salvation.

The prophet Isaiah's words ring in our ears tonight;  
Surely he has borne our infirmities  
and carried our diseases;

yet we accounted him stricken,  
struck down by God, and afflicted.  
But he was wounded for our transgressions,  
crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the punishment that made us whole,  
and by his bruises we are healed.

It says that this victim is struck down by God and afflicted. In fact, it is the people, "We" who have accounted him stricken and struck down by God. The people who behold this suffering think that God has ordained this. But this suffering does not happen to the victim in divine judgement, for the victim is clearly innocent. This suffering is not mandated or demanded by God. It is rather a consequence of the fateful response to God's truth and goodness that will always reject it. Jesus says to Pilate: "For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." But Jesus is rejected. God's righteousness is met with sin, and this causes the suffering. Thus we can say that he was wounded for our transgressions, and upon him was the punishment that made us whole. The suffering can be transformed to wholeness because it is God himself who suffers.

Some may ask, how does this particular suffering then bring our healing? When put into historical perspective, Jesus ordeal is not unique. Jesus is identified early in the Gospel story as a threat to the religious leaders of Jerusalem. He becomes a political threat. So have many people in the recorded history of human societies. Jesus is targeted for capture and execution. How many people over the centuries have suffered a similar fate? Jesus is arrested on trumped up charges, is tried in an unjust court, and is tortured before being executed; all at the hands of local elites abetted by an empire that wants political stability more than the truth. How many people over the centuries have suffered a similar fate? How many suffer today a similar fate? Many.

So what makes the suffering and death that Jesus experiences a suffering and death that can heal the ruptured relationship between sinful humanity and a righteous God? It is not that Jesus' ordeal is harsher or more terrible than that of other innocent victims. It is simply that in Jesus, it is God going through this ordeal for us. God suffers, dies, and is raised to life, for us. This proves that the promise of God's forgiveness is for us. In the marketplace of salvations, balms and cures, is

the salvation you hope for legitimate? Is it really a salvation that saves all, or just some? Or is it a religious or spiritual fad, or a fake promise of well-being or deliverance without any care for true justice. Is the salvation you cling to the empty promises of a world mired in sin and death? Well, it has to involve the suffering and death of God for you, or else it will not do. Not because there is some law in the universe that demands suffering. It's just that this is the way it went down. God came into the world but the world rejected God. And it happens over and over again. Thus the only one who can change our relationship with God is God himself. But how can God convince you that you have been forgiven? God is the only one who can bring peace between us. God is the only one who can forgive our sin. God is the only one who can rescue us from death. God is the only one who saves, because God is the only one who can die and then rise to eternal life.

Now we can say that God judges the sin of humanity on the cross of Jesus. God judges it in his righteousness, by showing us that it is wrong. Whenever this treatment is leveled on anybody, it is wrong. But when done to God, it is proven wrong in the court of ultimate appeal. In Jesus' death and resurrection, it is in fact our sin that is being judged. However, it is not being punished. If God were to punish us for the sin we commit against him, the day of resurrection on Easter would become the dawn of the Apocalypse. Jesus' eternal life would be a death sentence for creation, a sentence of eternal punishment or even destruction into oblivion. But God doesn't punish our sin; God forgives our sin. God has endured our sin, and met it with his own love. Thus It means that Jesus' suffering and death absorbs the force of human sin and death. When human sin reaches out and strikes down the son of God, God does not strike back. In the cross, God simply absorbs the blow. But in the resurrection, God wins the fight, for you cannot defeat something that cannot die.

Brothers and sisters, what can we say that summarizes this state of affairs? It is hard to hear tonight that in the cross of Jesus, your sin against God and each other is on full display. It is hard to hear that the small slights or lapses that we brush off offend God. It's hard to hear that the cold calculation of power and violence, which we rationalize all the time, offend God. It's hard to hear that the unfortunate fate we see in the lives of those who suffer more than we do, all amount to grave offenses against the perfect love of God. Although God created the world, and declares it good, God does not accept the world as it is, but longs

to heal it, to redeem it. But this is the truth of Good Friday, that God must judge our offenses first, by bringing them to the surface, before God can forgive them. Like a poison under the skin, it must be brought out to the surface in order for healing to take place. God must die before God can rise from death.

May this truth keep us in faith in this holy Season.