

Good Friday Tenebrae Vespers

29 March, Anno Domini 2024

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

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

Children of God,

There are certainly lots of pictures of Jesus. Most of them show Him as either peaceful or happy or even laughing. And certainly our Lord knew peace and happiness. I would imagine that even enjoyed a good laugh on occasion. But the majority of Jesus life was not one of bliss or merriment. Those times only briefly punctuated the true tenor of our Savior's earthly life.

Consider a picture based on the words from the prophet Isaiah that we have just heard. There is no laughter or frivolity or lightheartedness in the Servant. Instead, "he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." He was wounded, crushed, covered in stripes, oppressed, afflicted, cut off, stricken, in

anguish, poured out to death, and numbered with transgressors. Jesus knew betrayal and hatred. People reviled and cursed Him. He was ridiculed and even rejected by His family. From the time He was born, Jesus was a hated and hunted man.

But it wasn't because of the hardship of His own life that Jesus was a man of sorrows. He didn't walk around feeling sorry for Himself because nobody seemed to like Him or understand Him. His sorrow came from knowing and seeing the destruction and chaos man's sin had caused. He was moved to compassion over the needless pain and suffering caused our foolish anger, our insatiable lusts, and our relentless selfishness. He wept over a creation that had become so marred and disfigured because of our hatred, our blindness, and our arrogance.

Your sin is the cause of Jesus' sorrow. "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." Do you sorrow over your sin? Does it cause you grief that you have rebelled against The Lord, spit in His

face, denied Him before men and cursed Him, blasphemed and dishonored His name? Do your wicked deeds and evil thoughts cause you shame? If you think sin is really no big deal, that your sin really isn't that bad, lift up your eyes to the cross and see the price of your sin, what forgiveness costs. God's own Blood is the only thing sufficient to redeem you. Or in the words of that beloved Lenten hymn "You who think of sin but lightly, nor suppose the evil great, here may view its nature rightly, here its guilt may estimate."

Sin kills. Sin damns. Sin, your sin, my sin, the world's sin, literally disfigured the Son of God to the point of no longer even looking human. It marred Him beyond human semblance. He became so grotesque that people didn't even want to look at Him. The sight was just too awful. That is what sin does. It disfigures and distorts. It leaves our souls marred and unrecognizable. And certainly there are many, including us, who don't want to see Jesus on the cross, who don't want to confront the reality of our sin and guilt. We want to focus on happier times and ignore our brokenness. Others are simply ashamed or embarrassed by the sight of Jesus stripped and

bleeding, suspended in agony and death. It's offensive and off-putting.

But this day is not about feeling sorry for Jesus. This isn't a pity party for our Lord. Jesus Himself, in the midst of His agony rebukes such any who would feel bad on His account:

"Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children." It is right to mourn your sin and what it cost God to redeem you. Fasting, ashes, and repentance are good and right.

But what causes you such deep grief, is also the cause of your greatest joy and deepest peace. For the cross preaches not only the great depth of your sin, it also preaches the unsurpassable and incomprehensible love of God for you, for sinners. There, hanging on the cross was all your sin. All of it. When you consider your sin, when your guilt weighs heavily around you look at Jesus on the cross. There is your guilt. There is your sin. On Jesus. Not on you. He bears it gladly because He loves you and nothing brings more joy to Him than to redeem back your life from the eternal fires of judgment. He gladly suffers

all so that you might be with Him where He is, seated in the kingdom of God, feasting on the blessedness of heaven and God's perfect and unveiled presence.

This day is God's will. The death of His only-begotten Son is God's will. Your salvation is God's will. He has offered up His firstborn to make payment for your soul. You, dear Christian, are the offspring of this Holy Day, this Holy Friday. You have been bought back, set free, sprung from death's dungeon. Jesus' anguish was real and it reached depths we will likely never know. He truly suffered. His anguish poured from His head like great drops of blood. His flesh truly was ripped from His body by the scourging. The crown of thorns caused real and deep pain. Seering pain shot through His body as the nails were driven through His hands and His feet. But nothing was as painful as the abandonment of His Father. That was the true anguish of Jesus' soul. He had been forsaken as you should have.

But Jesus is satisfied because His blood has made you righteous. He was pleased to let the water gush forth from His

crucified side so that it could wash over you in Holy Baptism and give you the new birth, cleansing you of all your sin, counting His own death as your death. He was pleased to offer His spotless life as the Passover Lamb, roasted under the fire of God's righteous wrath so that from this altar again this day you may feast on His Body and Blood. He is pleased to cover the doorposts of your lips, your hearts, and your minds with His Blood so that the angel of death would passover you.

Jesus is indeed a man of sorrows. But His sorrow has meant your salvation. The tears and agony of this day will end. Indeed, this day is the source of our deepest and most abiding joy because our sin has been taken away from us forever. And Jesus does not stay dead. Death isn't the end of the story. It isn't the end of your story. Sin has been conquered and death has been swallowed up. Your salvation is complete. Because there is no longer a sacrifice needed for sin, there is no death. You will not die because Jesus has died. But He does not stay dead because death has no dominion over Him. He lies in the tomb, resting on the Holy Sabbath to mark the work of redemption as complete. "It is

accomplished." Depart in peace.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding
keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.