

Good Friday – April 10, 2020  
Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Ps. 31  
Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9  
John 18:1-19:42

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

Several weeks ago, way back when we were still gathering in our church sanctuary and the world seemed to be a much more familiar place, we heard a lovely little children's sermon from Natalie Anderson. I wonder if any of you remember it. She was speaking to the kids about Valentine's Day which was soon approaching, and she told them that the best symbol for Valentine's Day is the cross. She beautifully said that the cross tells us of the greatest love there has ever been, and the greatest love that could ever be. And then I remember Natalie posing a question to the kids that went something like this: "isn't it such happy news that Jesus died for us on the cross?" and without missing a beat, Ben Sayas very courageously spoke up and said something like, "I think it's really sad." That made quite an impression on me, and I have to tell you Ben, if you are listening to this, you are exactly right. Jesus suffering for us and dying on the cross *is* very sad. We just heard the many details of this sadness in our gospel reading from St. John. And the church in her great wisdom has sought to commemorate both the sad parts and the happy parts every year when we come to this Holy Week, when we follow Jesus to his Passion and death. You see, Natalie and Ben are both right. The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is the greatest sign of love there could ever be, and yet the event that took place on that first Good Friday is a truly sorrowful one. The cross is at one and the same time happy and sad, beautiful and terrible.

The death of Jesus Christ is sad because it was on the cross that our Savior suffered and died for sin. And he did not just shed his blood for generic sin or for the idea of sin, but for actual sins, for the sin committed by every person whom God has made. He shed his blood for the very sins you and I have committed. Surely this is what it means that he bore *our* griefs, and carried *our* sorrows (Is 53:4). And what is even more sad is we despised him for it. We found him to be detestable. We found him without form or majesty, with nothing beautiful or desirable about him (Is 53:2). When left to ourselves, we would just as soon yell for a convicted criminal to be released and vindicated, and the purely innocent, spotless Lamb of God to be deemed guilty. For him we'd ask for the harshest of punishments. We'd join in and yell, "crucify him, crucify him!" Even though you and I were not in the crowd that Friday afternoon, we know that this is what our sin does. It blinds us to what is true and good and beautiful, and leaves us destitute, in a cave of miserable darkness. The hymn we just sang "Ah, Holy Jesus" pointedly puts the sorrow of the event this way:

Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon thee?  
Alas, my treason, Jesus, hath undone thee!  
'Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied thee;  
I crucified thee.

If we lose sight of the sadness of the cross of which our younger brother Ben so helpfully reminded us, we might get off into thinking that sin is inconsequential. But our Lord's death tells us that sin is anything but inconsequential. We know in our bones that this world is not the way it's supposed to be, and perhaps we know this more today than we did even a few months ago. Christians have

always looked to the cross of Jesus to know what sin is and what it does. Sin is not inconsequential, the cross says. And contrary to the vague spirituality promoted in our culture, sin cannot be paid for and dealt with by looking to ourselves for freedom from it. Sin does not get washed away by a more resolute will to do better next time, by better meditation practices or by any other form of turning inward. The best that our fallen religious imagination comes up with amounts to something like, “look inside yourself, there you will find your own way toward the best life.”

On the eerily quiet campus of Marquette University, there stands a huge billboard that simply reads in all capital letters: “BE YOU.” This is the resounding gong of our culture today. Yet the Christian message says something altogether different. “All we like sheep have gone astray,” the prophet Isaiah tells us (Is 53:6), and when we turn to our *own* way, we find that all our attempts at self-preservation and self-rescue will not suffice. Those attempts may feel good for a fleeting moment, but in the end, they will always leave us stuck, betrayed, alone, and trapped in darkness with no way out.

But on the hill of Calvary that dark Friday afternoon, it was Jesus who was stuck, betrayed, and fastened there on that beautiful, terrible cross. It was Jesus trapped in our darkness, who willingly chose to have no way out but to endure the suffering for the joy that was set before him (Heb 12:2). He would willingly receive our iniquity laid upon him and be crushed under the weight of the world’s sin (Is 53:5–6). The Son of God and Son of Man knows that sin is *not* inconsequential. Blood has to be shed, but the blood of bulls and goats would not be enough. Jesus shed his own blood, the blood of the only human without sin, and in so doing, he took on the shame and misery and ugliness of his lost sheep so that we could have his righteous life. As St. Paul proclaims in 2 Corinthians 5:21, “For our sake he made him [Jesus] to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

Just before Christ gave up his spirit, he cried out, “It is finished” (Jn 19:30). These are perhaps the most powerful words ever uttered from the lips of a human. Paradoxically, these were words that came from a man who was scorned, naked and spilling out blood, a man who could barely hold himself up to gain breath enough to make a sound. This is truly sorrowful. But he was also the Beloved, Beautiful, Spotless Lamb of God who spoke those words with all the power and force of heaven. In utter weakness, the hour of glory has been fulfilled (John 12:23, 27; 17:1). Jesus declares “it is finished,” and he has won.

So what exactly *is finished*? Sin is finished. Sickness is finished. Sorrow and grief are finished. Death and hell are finished. All that is wrong with this world is finished. And while we yet only know this by faith in Christ’s sure word, soon enough, faith will give way to sight. This is why we confess with Natalie that the death of Jesus is the happiest news this world can ever hear. Saints of God, our sin and its devastating wake have been finished by the death of our Lord. Hymn writer Jonathan Evans expresses it this way:

It is finished, oh what pleasure,  
can these charming words afford,  
heav’nly blessing without measure,  
flow to us from Christ the Lord  
It is finished! It is finished, saints the dying words record!

Finished are the types and shadows

of the ceremonial laws  
Finished all that God had promised  
Death and hell no more shall awe  
It is finished, it is finished, saints from hence your comfort draw!

What have we to do when we come face to face with such love and grace, such sorrow met together with unspeakable joy? Draw comfort, saints, and turn your hearts to behold and adore the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, who takes away your sin and mine. Amen.