

Rev. Danny Mackey
Good Friday
April 19, 2019
John 18-19
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Muncie, Ind.

Many of us have heard it said that our sin nailed Jesus to the cross. This is not true. This is an abuse of Scripture, specifically Colossians 2:13-14, which reads, "God made [you] alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross." This abuse of Scripture is heinous. It robs Christ of His compassion and robs us of comfort.

Saying that our sin nailed Jesus to the cross is an accusation. It's as if I were to point my finger at you and say, "You killed Jesus with your sin!" I ask: Were we there among the guards that marched into Gethsemane and arrested Jesus? Were we there at Caiphas's house, where Jesus stood before the Sanhedrin in that mockery of a trial? Were we there standing among the crowd at Pilate's porch, yelling "Crucify him"? Were we there along the Via Dolorosa as Jesus carried His cross? Were we there on Golgotha where He was raised up on a tree, naked and bloody, a spectacle? Were we there, standing with those mocking Jesus, as He hang dying? Were we there when they crucified our Lord? No. No, we were not.

We did not nail Jesus to the cross with our sins. We did not cause the Son of God to die in bitter agony and pain. In John 10 Jesus says, "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father" (Jn 10:17-18). Jesus is the Pascal victim; however, He is a *willing* victim. He went to the cross of His own free will, not because He was forced to do so but because He desired to do so.

What is Jesus' response to sin? To our sin? How did Jesus respond as He beheld His people gathered together? Matthew 9:36 tells us, "When [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." Jesus' response to sin isn't one of judgment or condemnation, anger or disappointment. Rather, Jesus feels compassion, a compassion only God feels, borne out of love for those He's created—for all people, regardless of belief, of birth, of economic status or nationality or any such thing we use to divide us one from another. He has created us all.

His compassion is for all. Because, apart from God, all of humanity is harassed and helpless. Apart from God, all people are like sheep without a shepherd.

As Isaiah 53:6 says, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way.” Sin enslaves. It makes us cower before God, fearing His wrath and just anger. Sin reacts to God’s holiness with despising and mockery. Sin has great power over us, ruining lives and relationships and causing wars and hate and bloodshed. Sin has great power over us, but it has no power over Jesus.

Jesus would shepherd us. His compassion moved Him to leave the throne of God in heaven to come down to earth. His compassion moved Jesus to do everything He could—even death on a cross—to rescue us from our sin and its consequences. He who is Life Itself, would have us not dead but alive. He would not have us be victim to sin, harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Because of His compassion, Jesus took our sin upon Himself, willingly, completely, utterly. Not in part, but the whole of sin did Jesus take. Not just our sin, but the sin of every human creature who has ever walked the earth and who will ever walk the earth. That sin He laid upon Himself. As Isaiah 53 continues: “and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” And as St. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5: “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin” (2Co 5:21). So it is, as Colossians 2 rightly says, it was not our sin that nailed Jesus to the cross but that *our sin* is nailed to cross.

Jesus, as our sin, is nailed to the cross. The wages of sin is death. Jesus has paid the wages with His death. All our trespasses are forgiven. The record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands is canceled. Set aside. Nailed to the cross. With His sacrifice on the cross, Jesus prayed out of compassion for all those who were indeed there—and also for us—“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

We are forgiven by His cross. Because Jesus has taken our death, we need not die but can live. Because Jesus has taken our sin, we no longer need to live enslaved to sin, our lives subject to sin’s ruin. Because Jesus has gone to the cross, we are not left harassed and helpless but have Him—He who is our greatest help and comfort, who has compassion for us, His creatures. Jesus didn’t die on the cross because of our great sin. Jesus died on the cross because of His great compassion and love for us. And that, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, is why we call this Friday “good.”

Rev. Danny Mackey
Easter Sunrise
April 21, 2019
John 20:1-18
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Muncie, Ind.

During the cool of the day, God had the habit of walking with Adam and Eve in the Garden. He spoke to His children, the man formed from the earth's dust and the woman taken from the man's side. God told them of the wonders of Creation. How the light and life were spoken into existence. He blessed them, "Be fruitful and multiply." He cared for them, providing work for their hands, giving them purpose and meaning. He loved them, holding them close to Himself.

Then another of God's creatures slipped into the Garden. He spoke the Lie. The woman believed him, along with her husband. Together they disobeyed God's command. Their trespass caused them to hide, to cower from their God when He came once again in the Garden. They became slaves to their fear. God gave them no cause to fear, but fear they did, their thinking perverted by the Lie of knowing good and evil. They had done evil, so they thought, "We must surely die." Their trespass caused a divide between them and their God.

Evil for evil. Evil begat evil. The man and woman's first son slew their second; Abel slain by Cain's hand. Abel was separated from his parents; Cain was cast out, made to wander the earth. The Lie increased. Murder and selfishness and greed and evil grew. The sons and daughters of our first parents wandered farther away from the God who once walked with humanity in the Garden. The separation widened. The dividing wall grew.

Their evil was so great God sent a flood in order that some might not be lost. Eight souls in all—and we, the descendants of those eight souls in all. But one son mocked his father Noah, and division again came between father and child, brother and brother, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Where there was not faith and love, fear and hatred ruled. Perfect love casts out fear. True faith gives no cause to hate another. But we have not true faith, nor perfect love. A dividing wall of hostility separates us from one another, separates us from our God, who created us, who loves us and would have us be loved by Him.

Because we could not overcome that which separates us, He came to us. The Father sent His Son to once again walk upon the earth, telling us of the wonders of redemption. The creation that was wrested away from Him with the Lie, He proclaimed, would be restored

by the Truth. "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life," says the Son. "I am the Resurrection and the Life." In His own flesh, God has crossed that separation, joining Himself to us, His creatures. God's Son is both true God and true Man.

He did not come to wrestle against flesh and blood but against the dark powers and principalities of this world. He came to overcome the Lie. He came so that we might not cower in fear, terrorized by the just wrath of the Father, so that we might not surely die. God's Son is not our enemy. Rather, He is our friend, our brother, our Savior and Redeemer. He came to rescue us from the Lie and death and separation. He came to reconcile us to the Father. So that we might walk once again with God in the Garden during the cool of the day.

The Father answers evil with evil—the evil of the cross. Death is swallowed up by death—the death of His Son. The Deceiver is seemingly deceived—with Jesus' body entombed. Separation is met by separation—the Son forsaken by the Father. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son so that whoever believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him." The Son heard the Father's command, and, unlike our first parents, He obeyed fully, completely, utterly.

Now is the day of salvation! On this morning, those many, many years ago, the women went to the tomb as the sun arose. They wished to render love and devotion one last time to their teacher. But the stone that sealed the tomb had been rolled away and they found the tomb empty. Mary Magdalene wept, convinced someone had absconded with the body of her Lord. But this Jesus, whom the Father had given into death, had been raised. He first appeared to this woman dearly loved. Death could not separate her from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. The risen Christ declared to her, "I am ascending to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God."

Jesus' Father is our Father. Jesus' God is our God. In Jesus, God and Man are reconciled. We are united with God in the death and resurrection of the Son. We have been remade by the death of Christ. We have been joined to God by the wounded hands and pierced side of Christ. Even in His resurrected flesh, Jesus forever bears the marks of His crucifixion so that we might never be without His redemption.

Man is raised from the dust of Jesus' death. The Church has been formed from Jesus' side. God blesses us once again: "Go and make disciples of all nations." He cares for us. He

loves us and holds us close to Himself with Word and Spirit. He provides us work for our hands, giving us purpose and meaning, that is, the salvation of our fellow human creatures, so that all might believe the Truth and have life in His name. Therefore, let us join together in the joyous Good News of this festive day: Jesus is risen!

Rev. Danny Mackey
Easter Day
April 21, 2019
Mark 16:1-8
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Muncie, Ind.

“Do not be alarmed,” the angel spake. Angels say such things because of our frail natures. Our fears, worries, anxieties get ahold of us. They cause us to behold a distorted reality. These women, already in their grief, are even more concerned that the stone is rolled away than they were previously, when they questioned who would roll away the stone for them from the tomb’s entrance. When they come face to face with one described as a “young man, sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe,” they are terrified. The women knew not what was happening. This could not be a mere man. His robes are too white—too pure, too clean, too perfect, too brilliant. And with a voice from heaven itself he spoke: “Do not be alarmed.”

“You seek Jesus of Nazareth,” the angel prompted the women. They did not come to the wrong tomb. This was the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea; however, the body of Jesus of Nazareth had been instead laid within. Jesus of Nazareth, the One whom they followed. As they cared for Him in life, providing for the needs of His body—His meals, the washing and mending of His garments—so they wished to provide this last of His body’s care—the washing of His flesh so that He might be properly enshrouded in burial cloth.

Yet this Jesus of Nazareth, spake the angel, possesses greater renown than simply being from His hometown: He is the One “who was crucified.” These women sought to display such love for One such despised. Never before had One crucified been shown such honor after such dishonor. They loved Him to the end, these women did. They loved Him—the One who has borne the marks of crucifixion. They came to wash and repair His back, scourged by the flayer’s whip. They came to wipe His brow, which sweated blood, upon which His accusers spat, into which was pounded a crown of thorns. They came to wash His limbs, which were spread and stretched across the beams of the cross. They came to wash the hands and feet, through which nails had been driven, leaving holes that would not close. They would wash His side, which a Roman spear had pierced, showering forth water and blood. This is indeed the Jesus of Nazareth, now forever known as the crucified One.

Little did they know He bore all those wounds because of His love for them. Instead of the crucifixion being an ugly thing of sadness and horror, it is the greatest sign of the greatest love for humanity. “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.” This Jesus had told them a few evenings before, as they celebrated that last Passover. Those wounds are the marks of His love for them. He loved them, these women; He loved them to the end. Thus, the crucifixion became transformed in their hearts and minds—translated and transfigured into a beautiful thing of joy and comfort.

“By His wounds we are healed,” the prophet spoke. Jesus of Nazareth promised, “And they will mock him [the Son of Man] and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.” “He has risen,” the angel announced to the women, “He is not here.” The Words of our Lord echoed. The prophecies reverberated throughout the ages.

With arms outstretched, the angel gestures to the resting place of Jesus, the crucified One. “See the place where they laid Him,” spoke the angel. The women beheld the place vacated. No body of the One they dearly loved. Only the linen cloths lay there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus’ head, was not lying with the linen cloths but folded up neatly in a place by itself.

“But go,” commanded the angel, “tell His disciples and Peter that He is going before you to Galilee.” At the angel’s command, the women are freed, released from the tomb. The One whom they loved, the One who was crucified, was not there. Only the angel with his glad news and the empty linen cloths. This Jesus of Nazareth has no need for burial cloth. He is alive. He is risen! [He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!] The women came seeking to offer Him a gracious love offering. Instead, they were the first to hear the greatest news of Jesus’ love and grace for us all.

The crucified One did not leave them without a promise. “There you will see Him,” the angel spoke, reminding the women, “just as He told you.” The women would have helped serve that last Passover meal, on the night in which Jesus was betrayed. His promise for the disciples was a promise for them as well: “But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.” Death and crucifixion would not separate them from His love. “Go to Galilee, just as He told you. There you will see Him,” the angel spoke. Jesus is not only the One who was crucified. Jesus is the One who was raised.

To Peter and the disciples has been given the proclamation of the Gospel. On them the crucified and risen One breathed the Holy Spirit. To them He blessed, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending you." Also, "Go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation." That Gospel we have had announced, proclaimed, preached to us. Still, in sacred Scripture, Peter and the disciples give eyewitness testimony of the crucified and risen Jesus. His peace, peace that calms anxious hearts and minds, that peace which passes all human understanding, is graciously delivered by those in unbroken line with the apostles.

The Word of the apostles and prophets echoes, reverberates into this joyous festive day! Jesus takes your death. Your place in the tomb has become His instead. He bears the marks of His crucifixion everlastingly, for they are the marks of His love for all creation, for all humanity, for you. That Word is the very voice from heaven. It declares wondrous and great promises to you. The ministers of God gesture to the sacred things: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved." "This is My body; this is My blood; given and shed for you, for the forgiveness of sins." There—in the washing with water, in the bread and the cup—we behold the One who was crucified and was raised. We behold Jesus of Nazareth, trusting His promises. It is as the angel spake: "There you will see Him, just as He told you."

Jesus has spoken; He has promised. He has been crucified; He has risen. He loves you, His own people; He will love you to the end.