

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church -- Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Good Friday – April 10th, 2009

Isaiah 53:4-6

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Dear forgiven children of God,

Place yourselves back 2000 years ago standing and watching as Jesus was dying on the cross. There were many miraculous things going on. One of them was described in this way, **“About the sixth hour . . . darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, for the sun stopped shining” (Lk 23:44,45).** The sixth hour would have been noon, and the ninth was then 3:00 P.M. In the middle of the day, the sun stopped shining. Some have said it was just a particularly thick storm in the sky, perhaps a huge cloud of sand blowing in the air. But they are wrong. An overcast sky would hardly be worthy of mention in the account of the death of Jesus Christ. What happened was nature itself had gone crazy. The darkness was only the start of it. We also read that there were earthquakes. Earthquakes are not uncommon in that area of the world, but the one that shook the earth that day was of such a violent nature that it split the rocks. It isn't really that special that an earthquake might break rocks and open up the graves, but that the dead people in them should come back to life and go into the city? That is something very different. It seemed the universe itself was turned upside down.

And our text tells us the reason why. God, after all, created this world on the foundation of the words of his mouth. And in our text the words he spoke are completely backwards, humanly speaking. They do not describe the way things are supposed to work. The grammar may be perfect, but the meaning is all mixed up and rather confusing the sinful world. But what could you expect from this particular day and this particular crucifixion, which began with the most out-of-place words of them all? A man pleaded to heaven for forgiveness for his murderers. The whole day didn't go as planned.

And thank God that it didn't. For out of that mess and confusion came the rock-solid foundation for our faith. Out of it came the grounds upon which our hope of salvation is built. Out of it came the answer to the prayer that we have concentrated on during the last six weeks:

Sermon Theme: Father Forgive Us For The Sake Of Your Son!

- 1. We have gone astray like sheep**
- 2. He has made the full payment for us all**

Isaiah the writer of the words of our text, wrote these words about our Savior hundreds of years before Jesus was even born, but they almost sound like Isaiah was standing at the foot of the cross and was an eyewitness to the horrors that Jesus was enduring. The first thing we want to do today is recognize why Jesus had to endure this horrible death. He puts it rather plainly, **“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way.”** It would make our souls more at ease to suppose that our troubles are not of our making. We might try, as did our first parents in Eden, to pretend that we were not the ones at fault. Or we might, like so many people today, try to believe that we are really the innocent victim. (well, pretty innocent). There have been those who have blamed God for our troubles, arguing that we have received a punishment far greater than any crime we may have done. And there are those who have made their minds believe that God has created us so in such a way that we cannot stop falling to these temptations - the old “God made me this way” syndrome. All too many people blame God for putting these things around me that lead me to sin. God if you would take those temptations away, I would be able to do better.

But what is the truth? The truth is hard to swallow once in a while, but we are sheep who love to wander and have no one truly to blame but ourselves. God has set a path before us, clearly marked out in his Holy Bible, and has commanded us that this is the way in which we are to walk throughout our lives. But we have decided that we can find something better or we know a better way than God's way. At every opportunity, people have found ways to go in any direction other than God's commands. This is not just an alternate way of doing things. It is a SIN!

We have spent this Lenten season looking at our sins according to the wrongs done to Christ on that Thursday and Friday. Even we Christians know that our lives have been filled with sins against our Creator and Lord. Like his frightened disciples in Gethsemane, we have fled from him when staying would have taken more trust in him than we had. Like the proud rulers of the Jewish Sanhedrin, we have not always liked the authority of his commandments. Like the mob in Pilate's courtyard, we have been annoyed when he hasn't given us everything we feel he owes us, and like Pontius Pilate, we have been afraid at times to stand up for his truth. The mockery of the soldiers in the Praetorium sounds all too familiar when we have tried to deny, or at least to soften what God wants us to do as his dear children. And we have often wept the fruitless tears like the women who followed Jesus to the cross, when what were called for were honest and sorrowful tears of repentance for our own sins.

We aren't innocent victims of the hardships that a sinful human race brought into this world. No one was forced us to sin; we chose it for ourselves. And we cannot argue that since we were born in sin, we had no choice but to sin. That seems to sound so biblical, and yet it is nothing more than an excuse we use when we are caught. Don't get "theological" about this; we sin because we want to commit the sin. And thus we chose for ourselves the punishments pictured in Isaiah's words of this text. We should be carrying our own infirmities and sorrows; we should be stricken, smitten, and afflicted. The Bible itself tells us that this is our well-deserved sentence, because **"the wages of sin is death" (Ro 6:23).**

That is how things were supposed to be. But on that unusual and somewhat confusing Friday when the sun went down at noon, God made things turn out different for us. Oh, the wages of sin were paid—but not by the sinners. God's Son made the full payment for us all.

2. He has made the full payment for us

Even Nature was messed up because of what was taking place before the judgment seat of God. The innocent one was suffering for the sins of the guilty. The Creator was dying for the sins of his creatures. The Son of God was shedding his blood for the sins we committed against God himself. The object of the punishments is supposed to be the sinner. This is clear, not only from our common sense but even in the pages of the Bible. In Ezekiel the prophet's day, the exiled people of Israel accused God of making the children suffer in exile for the sins of their disobedient fathers back in the old days in Judea. God answered them back in no uncertain terms that no one was dying for any sins but his own: **"The soul who sins is the one who will die" (Eze 18:4).**

But what we have is someone else who suffers for our guilt. It is not the souls who sinned but the one who never sinned that dies. And now think again of the list of woes that Isaiah speaks of here, **"Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed."** Did you catch some of those key words? Infirmity, sorrow, piercing, wounds. How difficult these would be to bear for those who truly deserved them! Think of how often sinners—even we ourselves—groan and sweat under the troubles we have in this world. How much more must these bring agony to the soul of him who alone never wandered and never went astray! It was a burden so great that he begged to be relieved of it in the final moments in Gethsemane. It was an agony so deep that in the midst of the darkness at midday, although he had always known the answer full well, he cried out to God the Father, **"Why have you forsaken me?" (Mt 27:46).**

But it was his desire and will that we should have peace and be healed by means of the turmoil and hurt he suffered there. It was only in this way that our sins could be paid for and our guilt could be covered. In

suffering our own punishment, we would have been lost forever. In suffering for us, he was able to save us from what we deserved. We would have been lost to eternal death and torment. But he promised, **“Because I live, you also will live” (Jn 14:19).**

Therefore, as the Bible says, something unheard of became possible. Full and complete justice was served, and every sin against the commandments received its full and horrible penalty. But, at the same time, the love and mercy of the Father was shown to sinners, who would not perish but be given the gift of everlasting life. God could be just and enforce his law to its last terrible measure but, at the same time, be merciful and take away all our guilt. **“Father, forgive them!”** was Christ’s plea. It was only in this way that Christ Jesus could win for us the answer to that prayer that we could never merit. He bought the answer at the price of his life’s blood. That we should go astray was sadly too predictable. That the Son of God should make full payment for our sins—no wonder the world of nature went out of whack.

When such a wonderful event took place in the courts of the Almighty, how could there not be a sign of it on earth? How could the rocks not shake and split? How could the tombs not cough up their dead? How could the sun continue to shine as if nothing were happening in the world it illuminated? And when God’s only Son, the Son he loves, the Son in whom he is well pleased, offered up his life for our sins and prayed, “Father, forgive them!”—and when we echo that cry, praying for God’s mercy for the sake of the innocent sufferings and death of Christ, his Son and our Lord—how could the Almighty refuse? How could Isaiah have written any other words than those at the end of our text, the words that shook the world, and the words that opened heaven to us all? **“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”** Amen.