

Good Friday 2017

"What's Done Is Done"

*Thou hast suffered great affliction and hast borne it patiently,
Even death by crucifixion, fully to atone for me;
Thou didst choose to be tormented that my doom should be prevented.
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be, dearest Jesus, unto Thee. Amen.*
(TLH 151)

We bring our Lenten meditations to a close this evening with a study of the death of our Savior. The texts that will form the basis for our meditation this evening are found in the Gospels of Matthew and John, and in Paul's Letter to the Romans:

^{ESV} **Matthew 27:3-5** *Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, ⁴ saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." They said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." ⁵ And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself.*

^{ESV} **John 19:21-22** *So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" ²² Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."*

^{ESV} **Matthew 26:73-75** *After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you." ⁷⁴ Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know the man." And immediately the rooster crowed. ⁷⁵ And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.*

^{NKJ} **John 19:28, 30** *After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now accomplished... said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*

^{ESV} **Romans 5:18-19** *Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. ¹⁹ For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.*

These are the verbally inspired words of our God. Humbly asking our God to bless our Good Friday study of His Word, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

Fellow Christians, I suspect many here this evening would agree that Good Friday represents arguably the most difficult of all Christian observances. "Difficult" in the sense that no other Christian celebration offers the same mixture of sorrow and joy; of pain and comfort; of horror and happiness – and all in connection with the death of our holy, innocent Lord Jesus. It can all be very confusing – which is not exactly what we are looking for in a church service or religious observance.

Perhaps the most difficult or confusing aspect of Good Friday and the death of our Savior is understanding just what emotions God deems appropriate for his children on this most solemn occasion. The dilemma is caused in part by the fact that though we know that our Lord died on this day, yet we also know that he did not remain in the grave, having been raised by the Father on the third day. Our emotions are further confused by the fact that heaven's door was opened for us by our Lord's innocent death on this night, which makes this morbid scene a true victory celebration for sinful and desperate mankind. It explains how and why last night we could sing the words we did and mean every of them:

*The death of Jesus Christ, our Lord, we celebrate with one accord;
It is our comfort in distress, our heart's sweet joy and happiness.*
(TLH 163 s.1)

Yet the questions remain. What would our God have us do? Do we rejoice, or do we mourn? Are we to feel sorrow or joy? Thanksgiving or shame? Or are we supposed to experience all of these emotions in the course of our commemoration?

First we would do well to acknowledge that we do not commemorate this day only or even mostly because our Savior suffered the *physical pain* of the cross, substantial and terrible though that was. That's our natural inclination, isn't it? We find it easiest to focus on those things that we can quantify and understand, the painful things that were done to Jesus' body – the whip, the crown of thorns, the nails, and the cross. These we can grasp, as we then imagine those things being done to our own bodies. The goal seems to be to thereby experience a certain measure of thankfulness and relief that we now do not have to suffer such things. The day then gets boiled down to *"I can't imagine how that must have hurt! Thank you Jesus that I don't have to be whipped, or to have nails pounded through MY hands and feet! Thank you for being crucified so I don't have to."*

To rightly commemorate the most important elements of Good Friday, remember a rather simple rule of thumb: *Thank Jesus not so much for doing what we could have done for ourselves (though obviously unpleasant in the extreme) but for doing what we could not do. Give thanks to our Savior-God on this day for doing what no one else could ever have done.* The fact is what we see on Good Friday is the culmination, the grand finale, of the epic struggle between Good and Evil, between Jesus and Satan. We see Jesus, in other words, accomplishing for us that which we never could.

A quick review of the various human beings that played a role in the events of Good Friday demonstrates the point, for there we see nothing but failure. This evening we examine three of those failures under the theme: *What's Done Is Done*. The first three highlighted in our texts for this evening include Judas, Pilate, and Peter. While they all have failure in common, we focus this evening on their subsequent actions, for they serve as examples of the three options available to us when we today fail.

And we will fail. We *do* fail. Miserably and repeatedly.

We begin with Judas. We will likely never fully comprehend the motives behind Judas' actions. What he did was clearly wrong, but the fact that Judas was surprised and remorseful when the Jews later condemned Jesus to death is telling. Regardless of why he did what he did, Judas reacted by demonstrating man's typical first reaction to his own sin, his own personal failure: he tried to undo, or make up for, the damage he had done. In other words, he didn't accept the simple truth that what's done is done. He desperately wanted to believe that he could make up for it.

We hear this "make up for it" silliness often and in a variety of forms in our day-to-day lives, which means that it is only natural that desperate human beings would try to do the same in their interaction with their God. A football player makes a catastrophic mistake, for example, and the first thing out of the commentator's mouth if that player later makes a good play is that he "made up for" the prior mistake. I always question whether or not that is actually true in something like football, but there is absolutely no doubt that it doesn't apply when it comes to sin.

Sin isn't something we can correct or "make up for." It's not like at a county fair where we are "winners" if we keep trying to knock down the bottles or throw a ring over a peg until we finally get it right. Sin is like pulling the pin on a hand grenade. Once done, it cannot be undone. Giving back what you stole doesn't make up for, doesn't cancel out, the original theft. There was nothing, for example, that Adam and Eve could have said or done to regain the perfection of Eden after they had sinned. Judas chose to try,

and he was just honest enough to admit to himself that he could in no way make up for or undo the terrible sin that he had committed.

Judas therefore represents man's first option when confronted with the reality of sin: try your best to make up for it.

Pontius Pilate represents the second option. There was absolutely no doubt in Pilate's mind that Jesus was innocent, and yet every single one of his subsequent actions represented a futile attempt to offer a substitute for that one right thing – which clearly would have been to declare Jesus innocent of all charges and to release him. He tried brutally whipping an innocent man to placate the bloodlust of his accusers. He tried passing him off to Herod as someone else's problem. He tried to release him as the guilty man pardoned annually at the Passover. He even tried literally washing his hands of the whole miscarriage of justice over which he himself was presiding. In the end he opted for the absolute worst possible course of action: he condemned to death the innocent Son of God.

In fact the only place where Pilate actually showed any sort of resolve was in connection with the sign that he ordered to be placed over Jesus' head on the cross. Here Pilate opted for the "what's done is done." Understand the rank hypocrisy and utter foolishness showcased here. Pilate knew that that sign was, by his own order, to be affixed above the head not only of an innocent man but of a *living* man. There was still time therefore for Pilate to reverse himself. Yet he made his "bold stand" not on correcting his terrible sin (which he still had the power to do) but on the wording of the sign.

This represents the second option available to mankind when confronted with sin: first, to act as though sin is both inevitable and unavoidable, and then to somehow justify that sin by arbitrarily making a "bold stand" in an area of our own manufacture.

We see the same sort of thing today when someone is caught up in a sin like, for example, having marital relations outside of marriage. Rather than repent and correct what is easily correctable going forward (stop sleeping together) those caught up in that sin routinely opt instead to act as though what's done is done and to pretend they have no choice but to continue in that sin. They then make themselves feel better about the whole sordid business by focusing their "virtue" elsewhere – like giving money to charity or donating time to a service organization. Trying to paper over sin by directing your resolve toward another aspect of your life accomplishes nothing and fools no one, least of all God himself.

The third option, when confronted with our sin, was demonstrated by Peter. Despite being warned specifically in advance, Peter failed miserably by denying his Lord. His reaction, once he realized what he had done, was telling: **"He went out and wept bitterly."** When confronted by his sin, Peter wept bitterly because he knew that there was absolutely nothing that he could do to undo or make up for what he had done. He knew that nothing "good" that he had done in the past, or could do in the future, could ever cancel out what he had just done to his Lord. He was consumed by the awful realization that what he had done was indeed irrevocably done.

This is the proper Christian reaction to sin and failure – the recognition and acceptance of our sin and of the utter impossibility of ever making it right with God.

All of which would leave us in a most desperate and hopeless state if not for our final two readings this evening. The first is Jesus' own declaration of *"what's done is done"* – expressed by him with three words that form the greatest sentence ever spoken: **"It is finished."** Man could do absolutely nothing to make up for or cancel sin, but God could. God did. That's what happened there on Calvary. Jesus there absorbed the punishment for every single sin. The result is that there, along with Peter, our tears of frustration and hopelessness are dried, our desperation and despair is answered, our impossible sin-problem is solved – removed forever. **"It is finished"** didn't just mean that Jesus' work was finished, it meant – it *means* – that no part of God's salvation plan for mankind is left undone. Nothing need be or can be added – certainly not from failed sinners. There Jesus paid what we never could.

The best news of all? What's done there is *done*. God the Father has accepted Jesus' perfect life and innocent death as greater than the sum total of all of mankind's sin. Nothing in all of creation can change what God there irrevocably declared. Our sin has been removed. Our debt has been paid in full.

This is the message of our final reading, the irrevocable, declared-by-God-himself verdict that man's sin-debt has indeed been paid in full:
"Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. ¹⁹ For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous."

You and I will likely continue to struggle to rightly celebrate this day, this event. While we mourn the depravity of our sin and the resulting death of

our Savior, we also are well aware that Jesus wasn't conquered by death. Through his death he *conquered* sin and death as our Substitute. So it is that we leave here this evening not in despair, but eagerly awaiting the celebration of the empty tomb on Easter morning.

God grant us the grace to commemorate this great event in perfect harmony with his will, and that he fill our hearts with the joy and comfort that our Savior won for us. Amen.

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Tonight's Organist – Eileen McEnroe

Good Friday Service – April 14, 2017

The Opening Hymn -#143- (Verses 1-7)

Invocation

Pastor: *In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

Congregation: *(Spoken) Amen.*

Confession and Absolution

P: *On this most solemn occasion we acknowledge that it was also our sin that caused the death of our Lord, and we therefore confess our sins in the words of the 51st Psalm:*

Psalm 51 *(Supplement page 28)*

P: *Jesus Christ, our Lord, paid the penalty for our sins upon Calvary's cross. Because of that sacrifice, I, according to His authority, and by His command, announce to you that all of your sins are forgiven, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

All: Hymn 175 (Verses 1-2)

The Scripture Lessons *(Printed below)*

The Apostolic Creed

I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,

Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,

born of the virgin Mary,

suffered under Pontius Pilate,

was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended into hell.

The third day He rose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven

and is sitting at the right hand of God the Father almighty.

From there He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy Christian Church

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins

the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

The Words of Christ from the Cross

(Hymn 177, Verse 1)

1. Our blessed Savior seven times spoke

When on the cross our sins He took

And died lest man should perish.

Let us His last and dying words

In our remembrance cherish.

ESV **Luke 23:32, Luke 23:39, John 19:25, Matthew 27:45, John 19:28, John 19:30, Luke 23:44** Two others, who were criminals,

were led away to be put to death with him.³³ And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.³⁴ And Jesus said, **"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."** And they cast lots to divide his garments.

¶ One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!"⁴⁰ But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?"⁴¹ And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."⁴² And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."⁴³ And he said to him, **"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."**

¶ but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, **"Woman, behold, your son!"**²⁷ **Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!"** And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

¶ Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour.⁴⁶ And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, **"Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?"** that is, **"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"**

¶ After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), **"I thirst."**²⁹ A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth.

¶ When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, **"It is finished,"** and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

¶ It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour,⁴⁵ while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two.⁴⁶ Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, **"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!"** And having said this he breathed his last.

(Hymn 177, Verse 9)

9. Whoe'er, by sense of sin opprest,
Upon these words his thoughts will rest,
He Joy and hope obtaineth
And, through God's love and boundless grace
A peaceful conscience gaineth.

The Sermon – Text (Please refer to the bulletin insert)

"What's Done Is Done"

The Post Sermon Hymn – 172 (Verses 1-2, 4, 9-10
"Oh Sacred Head Now Wounded"

The Offering

The Prayer of the Day, followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

P: *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
And the love of God the Father,
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

C: **Amen, Amen, Amen.** (Sung by all)

The Closing Hymn – 179
"On My Heart Imprint Thine Image"

Silent Prayer

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As is our Good Friday custom, the congregation will be ushered from the sanctuary in silence following the closing hymn. Those in attendance are asked to leave the church quietly thereafter. We observe this custom in solemn commemoration of the death of our Lord, and yet we do so not as those who mourn without hope. We commemorate this solemn event as those who recognize that the debt for our sins was paid in full by our Lord Jesus on this night. There is a time to mourn and a time to rejoice. So also we solemnly observe the death of our Savior this evening in full expectation that our Lord will turn our mourning into the joy of the empty tomb on Easter morning. All are therefore invited to gather here again on Easter morning for that greatest of all Christian holidays.

The Scripture Lessons

A compilation of the following passages:
Lamentations 1:12, Isaiah 53:3-6, Galatians 3:13, Romans 8:32,
John 1:29, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Revelation 5:13

***Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?
Behold and see if there is any sorrow like His sorrow.***

He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us.

Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.

God did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all.

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!