

Good Friday Service

Order of Worship: April 22, 2010,

Prelude

7:00 p.m.

Call to Worship: Psalm 22 and Prayer

Congregational Song

“Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed?”

Song # 306

Valerie Cagnacci reciting

Special Music:

“Via Dolorosa”

Mike Kokoletsos

Meditation:

“ ? ”

Pastor Bronson

Special Music:

Trombone solo by Ron Wolcott

Congregational Song

“Glory to His Name!”

Song # 493

Parting Word of Grace

Good Friday Message, “As He Walked” (I Peter 4:12-16)

Tonight the cross and the banners are draped with black to symbolize where we are at in the journey of Christ’s work for our salvation. So instead of the glory of His resurrection we contemplate the agony of His crucifixion and we remember what it meant for Him to buy us back.

“Now is my soul troubled and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour?’ But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.’ Then a voice came from heaven: ‘I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.’ The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, ‘an angel has spoken to him.’ Jesus answered, ‘This voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.’ He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.” (John 12:27-33)

That is from the Gospel of John, 12:27-33. The hour that Jesus was referring to in that statement was the hour of Good Friday, the day of His crucifixion and death. Jesus knew from the outset that it would be a terrible hour, unsurpassed in all eternity in both the revelation of God’s gracious love, and of His unyielding holiness. That unyielding, even implacable, holiness demands judgment. What God did on Good Friday in the manifestation of His holy love for sinners was incomprehensible to Satan. Satan knows nothing of compassion. He knows nothing of grace.

What God did on Good Friday accomplished the overthrow of Satan's hold on the sinner's heart. When we think about Satan, we should be clear; Satan was, is, and always will be a creature. He is a spiritual being created by God, and he is sustained in being by God. Satan's power over the world is exercised only by God's permission. That was as true before the cross as after. Satan exercises that power almost exclusively through the confused, fearful and guilty hearts and minds of the fallen. Satan offers himself and is received by humanity as a spiritual substitute for the true God. But Satan is not, never was and never will be a god. Satan cannot create life, he cannot sustain life, and he does not have within himself the principle or the power of life. Satan is a creature, and he lives under the sufferance of God.

This demands that we think very clearly about what has happened on Good Friday. The drama of Good Friday, while breaking Satan's hold over the darkened hearts and minds of sinners, was not in fact the drama of God's conflict with Satan, as if there ever was or ever had been a power struggle between God and His rebellious angel. The drama of Good Friday was God's holy love working in perfect concert with God's holy justice, satisfying the demands of God against sinners. The purpose of the drama was that the love of God could reclaim sinners from the judgment of death and give them eternal life in fellowship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It was not Satan's anger which Jesus had to endure; it was the Father's anger that He had to endure. It was not breaking the power of Satan's deceptions and manipulations which challenged Jesus, but rather satisfying and thus removing the power of God's law which held sinful men captive to its demands. Once Jesus had satisfied the demands of the Law by giving a life of perfect obedience, love and faith to the Father and had given Himself as a sinless, freewill offering and sacrifice for the sins of others, Satan's power was shattered even as the law of God was affirmed, and the love of God prevailed. The great life-giving river of God's grace now flows freely to the liberated hearts of the lost.

Jesus dreaded the hour and the prospect of its pain. What pain: whip, fist, thorns, the crushing physical weight of the cross, even the nails driven through His flesh, the weight of His body hanging on those nails compressing his lungs. All this, however, was as nothing compared to the pain of taking upon Himself the sin of all humanity in its vileness and defilement. Then, most of all, [there was] the pain of withdrawing from His Father. I spoke with someone not long ago. This someone has recently been forced, after many years of marriage, to sleep apart from his wife. He doesn't like it. Long association in the intimate bonds, deep familiarity, unquestioned comfort: gone. That's nothing compared to what the Lord Jesus Christ endured. I think it is one of the great struggles of widowhood to suddenly realize that with someone that your life has been intimately bound together such that the Bible says "one flesh" now is ripped apart. What was companionship is now aloneness: nothing compared to what the eternal Son experienced in being separated from the eternal Father. And [this was] not just by any happenstance, for what had separated them, what had come between them was something horrid and vile and terrible and ugly such that we are told that God cannot look upon such things: it was sin. That is what stood between them. Jesus was covered with the sin of man, and the Father had to draw back, and instead of embracing His Son with eternal affirmations and delight and love, it must be wrath to burn away that impurity. In the history of the church, it has been the practice of many to give extended, sober contemplation to what I have just described.

[Now] we do not often do so, I think to our loss. Never in eternity past had the Son been separated from the Father; but now instead of the unending song of the Father's love, there was silence. Instead of the fullness of joy at the Father's presence, there was absence; and instead of the harmonious harmonies of mutual delight, there was the thunder of judgment. What happened then is incomprehensible to us, yet nothing is more vital to our present and our eternal well-being. That well-being was, of course the objective of the whole course of action. The triumph of God's love in the enlightened minds and the liberated hearts of sinners: that was the reason for the hour.

It is also the reason for all that you and I endure in the world since that hour. What is critical for us to understand is that if we are to understand the life of faith, the journey on which the Spirit takes us as God's adopted children, it is that the Son of God did not take on our nature as creatures of flesh and blood simply in order to live righteously for us and then die sacrificially in our place. Jesus lived and died for us so that we then could die and live with Him as those who put sin to death in our mortal bodies and pursue righteousness to the glory of our great Redeemer's name. He lived for us and now we are to live for Him. We are, in fact, to walk in the way the He walked.

That is what we hear in Peter's words in I Peter 4:12-16. This is what he says: *"Beloved do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange was happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name."*

As our daily experience makes clear, when Jesus broke Satan's power over fallen humanity, He did not at the same time remove all sin from our lives. Our heavenly Father knows that righteousness is gained as love acts by obedience of faith in overcoming sin. As Christ graciously suffered for the guilt of the sins of all humanity, we are now called to share Christ's sufferings as we rely on his grace to put sin to death in our lives and help one another to remove sin and its effects from the world around us. It is a test of our obedience and our desire to bring the benefits of God's salvation to the world that God loves.

How important is this, we might ask? The answer is crystal clear, but almost always humanity manages to obscure the answer as it suppresses the knowledge of the truth in unrighteousness. Upon what does the wellbeing of humanity in the world hinge? How do we answer that question? Overwhelmingly we answer that question by saying we need more knowledge, more power in order to solve the endless array of problems and difficulties which stand between us and a good and happy life. We need to find the cure for disease. We need to develop sustainable forms of industry. We need to have economic growth. We need to learn to gain the world's natural resources without degrading the environment. We need to provide better schools with better learning resources so as to equip our children with the knowledge they need to live well; and on and on the list goes. However, I read this in an internet article the other day. I want you all to hang on and be quiet and calm and be civil people [as I read!].

“Obama’s term has been tumultuous, marked by crisis after crisis: a near collapse of the economy; persistent unemployment, three wars, a massive record-breaking oil spill, potentially ruinous levels of federal deficits and debt, violent unrest across the Middle East and North Africa, and Japan’s earthquake, tsunami and radiation traumas.”

Reflect on that list for a moment. Whether you agree with, like or in any way sympathize with Mr. Obama, you have to admit that is a pile of troubles. But consider that pile a bit more closely. Of the list only two are natural disasters for which humanity bears no immediate responsibility: the earthquake and the tsunami. All the rest are, in one way or another, the fruit of human decisions and actions. I contend they all could have been avoided if those responsible had not sinned. Sin, beloved, has absolutely enormous consequences in everyday life. We know this, but we prefer to ignore it. We isolate sin to a few things in a small corner of life and assume that the larger pattern of living is just a matter of common sense, missing or present. I am not one to say that every divorce is wrong under the circumstances in which such decisions are taken, but I do not hesitate to say that if sin were overcome or removed, there would be virtually no divorces needed. How much havoc in the world is caused by sin splitting families? If you eliminate divorce, you eliminate the number one cause of poverty as well as most of the underlying causes for adolescent behavior problems and criminality. But we prefer not to deal with sin and so we make up other answers.

Humanity is wedded to its sins, but Christians are not, or at least do not need to be. *“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. . .”* Paul writes in Romans 6:12-14. *“Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.”* You and I are called to identify with Christ and to have Christ walk with us in putting sin to death in our lives. *“Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.”* (1 Peter 4:1-2) We are called to walk as He walked. We are called as He walked even to the cross, not in this case to His cross, which none of us could bear, but to our own. This is what Jesus said: *“If anyone would come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life? For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.”* (Matthew 16:24-27)

Beloved, from Good Friday to Sunday morning, the morning of the empty tomb, the morning of the resurrection, is a good time for us to contemplate what it means to follow the Savior who died for us, what He endured, the price that He paid to set us free. Along with those things we need as well to contemplate what freedom means. He set us free to walk as He walked. For those who do, the promise stands: *“And now little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. If you know that He is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who is righteous has been born of him. See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world*

does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we will see him, and therefore we will be like him. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure." (1 John 2:28-3:3) This is our high calling and our joy, this is our hope and our confidence: we are the adopted children of God. It is not so much that God in His grace has lifted us out of the world, its sins and its sorrows, as it is that God in His grace has enabled us to be more than conquerors in the world. That is the challenge that you and I need to receive.

Please pray with me: Father as we reflect upon the great work of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are reminded not only of the price, but of the purpose, and to recognize, our Father, that the glories of our salvation are not limited or reserved only to that future day when the Lord Jesus Christ will return in glory with His angels. But rather, Father, You have in Your great goodness to us, given to us now the presence of Your Holy Spirit, the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we are privileged to walk with Him now, as He walked, as those who bring salvation to others and given to glory to Your gracious name. May we be faithful, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.