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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
March 27, 2019
4th Midweek Lent

Passion History: Trial before Pilate
Hymns: 155; 145; 175; 565

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: John 19:17-18

And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called *the Place* of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha, ¹⁸ where they crucified Him, and two others with Him, one on either side, and Jesus in the center. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, our crucified Savior, dear fellow redeemed:

INTRO: It is amazing how our reaction to something can change by an event in our lives. Most often when this happens it is from a favorable response to a very negative reaction. A teenager loves his car until the accident when someone is seriously injured by his carelessness, and suddenly that teenager is repulsed by the car. In college young people see hazing as innocent fun, a joke, until someone is hurt or even dies, and then it is seen as disgusting and distasteful cruelty that it is. Even a scenic view can lose its appeal when it is associated with

personal upset or accident. One may never desire to visit that place again. I know people with strong aversions to hospitals, funeral homes.

We make so many associations of feelings with things. Sometimes the most innocent thing can bring back a flood of painful memories. In our meditation this evening we are going to see the opposite of these examples. Our memento of Christ's passion this evening is a cruel instrument of torturous execution, and yet it is I'm sure the most commonly held memento of Jesus' Passion. For us it has been throughout our lives an object of comfort and assurance and faith. This evening let us consider the memento of --

THEME: Jesus' Cross.

I. The Cross was indeed an Instrument of Cruel Death.

The manner of death which Jesus experienced had been adopted by the Romans from the eastern and oriental countries where crucifixion had been in use for many centuries. It was considered an especially harsh sentence, and a barbaric punishment which Roman law restricted from use against its own citizens. For example the Apostle Paul, a Roman citizen, was beheaded, not crucified. The Jewish custom was to stone the condemned to death, which while it sounds extremely brutal was actually much less cruel than crucifixion.

Crucifixion was reserved for the worst offenders, to accentuate by this slow and agonizing death of such criminals the severity of their crime and to display how seriously Rome took this offense. This terror was used for its deterrent value. Oftentimes death by crucifixion took up to three days before the condemned expired from the rigors of the unnatural body position impeding the ability to breathe and encouraging congestive heart failure. Along with that was the exposure to the elements, the

extreme thirst and dehydration, and the infection and sometimes even gangrene that set in their wounds. It was the custom that the place of execution would be along a major roadway or thoroughfare that the condemned be exposed to the maximum number of people, who would not only get the message of what crossing Rome could bring them, but who would also often join in the derision and ridicule of the dying men, adding to their torment.

So it was at Jesus' crucifixion. As was also the custom Jesus, as the condemned, was expected to carry His own cross as the procession of soldiers and condemned criminals made its way to the site of execution. At Jerusalem this was a place called Golgotha, a mound or small hill on the outskirts of Jerusalem that had the curious resemblance in shape to a skull. We learn from the other gospel accounts that as they went on their way a man named Simon from Cyrene was compelled by the Roman guard to carry Jesus' cross for Him. This was not a sign of compassion from the soldiers, but rather evidence of the severity of injuries already inflicted upon our Lord. Bearing His own cross was slowing the procession down. It was a violation of Roman legal code that a condemned man be both scourged and crucified. And yet that is exactly what Jesus had endured. The sight of Jesus in this procession was so gruesome the women wept for Him. But Jesus was not consumed with self-pity as He bore His cross according to His Father's will for our salvation. He lamented the fate that would befall Jerusalem.

At Golgotha the three condemned to die that day were crucified, one malefactor on each side of Jesus, placing Jesus in the central position of prominence. And so the condemned were hanged upon the cross, hung there with spikes driven through hands and feet that all might see the just reward of crime.

But wait! Even with such graphic details before us the picture is not complete! We must remember this, Jesus was not found guilty of any crime, or any wrongdoing

whatsoever. Add to the agony of His suffering the knowledge of an injustice beyond our imagining. Jesus was condemned for the sins of others. It was our sins, and all the crimes of all mankind which Jesus bore to the cross. It was not only the torturous punishment of man that Christ endured, but the condemnation and wrath of God which Jesus endured. We have all experienced pain, and know enough from that to not want to imagine even the physical torment which our Lord endured, but the spiritual torment of God's punishment for sin which Christ endured is beyond human experience in this life. It is beyond our ability to imagine. If what could be seen of Jesus' sufferings was grim what could not be seen can only be appreciated by Jesus' own desperate cry, *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"*

(Matthew 27:46)

"Tell me, ye who hear Him groaning, Was there even grief like His?
Friends thro' fear His cause disowning, Foes insulting His distress;
Many hands were raised to wound Him, None would interpose to save;
But the deepest stroke that pierced Him Was the stroke that Justice gave.

"Ye who think of sin but lightly Nor suppose the evil great
Here may view its nature rightly, Here its guilt may estimate.
Mark the sacrifice appointed, See who bears the awful load;
'Tis the Word, the LORD's Anointed, Son of Man and Son of God."

(The Lutheran Hymnal 153:2-3)

That is the cross of Christ, an instrument of great distress and woe for our Lord Jesus, and yet in our meditation this evening we consider this memento of Christ's Passion to be the Blessed Cross.

Well, for us, it is just that, as we look upon --

II. The Cross as a Symbol of Forgiveness and Eternal Life.

The cross is our symbol of victory over sin and death because Jesus was victorious in death. Jesus accomplished what the Prophet Isaiah foretold in his 53rd chapter:

“Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors.” (Isaiah 53:12)

Jesus willingly poured out His soul unto death, out of love for us sinners, a love which He evidenced in the prayer for forgiveness for those who crucified Him. Yes, Jesus was numbered with the transgressors, He was seen as a criminal, treated as a criminal, not for His own crimes, but for ours. It is those words of Isaiah that open our eyes to see in the cross the victory and the hope that was secured for us by Christ Jesus. The Father in heaven declared the success of Jesus’ mission by promising the victor’s rewards of honor, glory and the spoils of war. What Jesus secured for Himself as the spoils of battle are our eternal souls. He did all this that we might be His own and live under Him in His kingdom!

Knowing all this our mental association with the cross is not that of the sufferings or shame which criminals endured when sentenced to this ignominious death; nor is our association with the cross limited to the sufferings of our Lord Jesus. We look to the cross as a Memento of Jesus’ Passion because the cross brings to our minds Jesus’ **love** for us sinners. It reminds us so vividly and wonderfully of the unbelievable extent of Jesus’ love and concern for **all** sinners, even as Jesus’ words on the cross reveals that love for **every** sinner! He cared about the condemned man next to Him, even while Jesus was Himself suffering so intensely. He was concerned for the care of His mother while He Himself was languishing on the cross. He prayed for His enemies while experiencing intense pain hanging on the cross to which they had nailed His hands and feet! Now He cares for you, and extends to

you that same undying love and concern and attention that drove Him to the cross in the first place. Now, with His sufferings complete and our eternal life secured, the cross shows us that there is no problem or distress too great for the Lord to resolve. Neither is there any individual too insignificant or too unworthy for the Lord's love and concern.

"In the cross of Christ I glory Towering o'er the wrecks of time.
All the light of sacred story Gathers round its head sublime.

"When the woes of life o'ertake me, Hopes deceive and fears annoy,
Never shall the cross forsake me; Lo it glows with peace and joy.

"When the sun of bliss is beaming Light and love upon my way,
From the cross the radiance streaming Adds more luster to the day.

"Bane and blessing, pain and pleasure By the cross are sanctified;
Peace is there that knows no measure, Joys that through all time abide."

(The Lutheran Hymnal 354)

AMEN.

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, To receive power and riches and wisdom. (Revelation 5:12) Amen.

(The congregation response is hymn 367:4 printed following the sermon in your bulletin.)

"Worship, honor, power, and blessing Thou art worthy to receive; Loudest praises, without ceasing, Meet it is for us to give. Help, ye bright angelic spirits, Bring your sweetest, noblest lays; Help to sing our Savior's merits, Help to chant Immanuel's praise."