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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
April 10, 2019
6th Midweek Lent

Passion Lessons: Jesus on the Cross
Hymns: 149; 154; 173; 653

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

Sermon Text: John 19:31-37

“Therefore, because it was the Preparation *Day*, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and *that* they might be taken away. ³²Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. ³³But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. ³⁴But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. ³⁵And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe. ³⁶For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, ‘Not *one* of His bones shall be broken.’ ³⁷And again another Scripture says, ‘They shall look on Him whom they pierced.’” (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

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

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Memento of Jesus Passion – a Lethal weapon
We have had quite a variety of mementos of Jesus' passion. We have had an alabaster box at one end of the spectrum to the crown of thorns and the cross itself at the other end of the spectrum. This evening's memento surely belongs in the same category with those instruments used by man to inflict harm and even death to others. The memento of Jesus' passion that serves the focus of this evening's meditation struck fear in many a brave heart "The Roman Soldier's Spear." The Roman legions were well trained and practiced in its use. As a fighting force they knew how to penetrate the lines of the enemy and kill and maim others efficiently. While the soldier's spear, struck fear in the hearts of so many it is our prayer that it will strike home in our hearts with the certainty of our salvation. --

THEME: The Soldier's Spear Assures us the Deed Is Done!

The chief priests were so concerned about appearances. They made their pretenses at righteousness and ceremonial cleanliness Even as they insisted that Jesus Christ the righteous be crucified. But let no accuse them of a lack of regard for the Law of Moses! And so they were concerned that for the Sabbath, especially for this Sabbath of Passover week that the executions of the condemned be complete and the dead bodies removed from public display. They didn't want the crowds inadvertently defiled and unclean for the Passover observance, so that the Passover would be ruined for many that had come so far for Passover week. What grand hypocrisy they displayed. But in their hypocritical posturing the purpose of God was fulfilled.

I. There is no Doubt -- Jesus Died.

Roman tradition was to leave the condemned to suffer however long it took, which was at times as long as three days; and then to leave the corpse upon the cross to rot,

all as an object lesson regarding the shameful end one would meet if they dared defy Roman law.

According to the law of God the executed, including those who were hung on a tree, were to be buried on the day of their death. So the ceremonial law of God, which was so meticulously observed by the Jews, required that Jesus' body as well as the bodies of the other two malefactors be removed from the cross before sundown, the beginning of Sabbath. To assure a speedy demise of the condemned the chief priests petitioned Pilate that the legs of the condemned be broken. This hastened their death and their bodies could then be removed from public display. The breaking of their legs would make it almost impossible for a crucified man to continue the necessary but torturous maneuver of pushing up against the spikes and bindings holding their feet to the cross, to raise their torso and enable them to gasp for their breathe. As they hung upon the cross breathing became increasingly difficult as their bodies were distended by the unnatural position imposed by crucifixion, and their chest cavity became painfully inflamed and filled with bodily fluids. As gruesome as one might imagine the process of the Roman soldiers crushing the legs of the condemned with their bludgeons, it actually brought a quick if not merciful end to the torment of crucifixion.

And so the physical agony of the criminal to Jesus' right and then also to Jesus' left was suddenly and cruelly intensified as they suffered this brutality of having their legs crushed, but when the soldiers came to Jesus they saw that Jesus was already dead. Why bother with breaking His legs? It would neither speed His death nor intensify His pain, but to assure that they were thorough in their duty, that they could affirm that Jesus was dead -- one of the soldiers took his spear and thrust it deep into Jesus' side. He thrust his spear as he had been trained to do, with a proficiency that assured that the recipient of that spear thrust was very dead indeed.

There is no doubt about what took place. The verb in our text is the Greek verb for thrust, a piercing with a stab or lunge. The wound this left was not a little scratch as if the soldier was prodding Jesus with the point of the spear to see if there was any reaction. The wound inflicted upon Jesus' body was great and deep so that after Jesus' resurrection Jesus could invite Thomas to thrust his hand into Jesus' side. This was a large and gaping wound inflicted by a professional soldier trained in how to kill.

This soldier's spear is an important memento of our Savior's passion because it assures the deed was done, the sacrifice for sin was complete; Jesus had died for us. The soldier's commanding officer would report of Jesus' death to Pilate with absolute confidence.

This also brought forth additional evidence of Jesus' death. It is reported that a flow of blood and water came out of this wound. This demonstrates the nature and depth of the wound Jesus' body received. The spear most certainly entered deep into the chest cavity, into the heart itself, piercing the pericardium, the membrane that surrounds the heart and when in such distress as crucifixion filled with fluid leading to the death of the condemned. The blood which filled the heart muscle flowed from the wound together with that watery fluid. Any lesser spear thrust than a stroke directly to the heart would not have brought such a flow of blood and water. Jesus was already dead and the spear thrust assured that death.

Why should we care? Why was this even recorded in Scripture? Many of the modern commentators and critics of Christianity of the past century or so have convinced so many of the Christian pastors throughout our land that Jesus very likely did **not** die on the cross, but had rather only become comatose. They propose that on Easter morning Jesus revived, which the disciples then perceived as a resurrection when in fact it was only a recovery of consciousness after Jesus had rested in the tomb. This lie

coming from the father of all lies would seek to undermine our confidence that the deed was done, that the Lord Jesus died upon the cross for the remission of sins. The recorded evidence demonstrates that nothing could be further from the truth.

Yes, the deed is done!

II. The Words and Promises of God Are Fulfilled.

All that God had promised, all that the prophets had foretold was fulfilled in the death of Jesus, our Redeemer. God promised that the Seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head. (Genesis 3:15) God promised that in the Seed of Abraham all the nations of the earth would be blessed. (Genesis 22:18) One cannot see that promises like these were fulfilled in the death of Jesus, but the Lord has also foretold in great detail the things Jesus would suffer and endure. These things were witnessed and are now recorded for our learning. The evidence is complete as the Scriptures found their fulfillment in Jesus. And that is what we find in the Memento of the Soldier's Spear.

The Lord presented to the people of Israel the picture of the paschal lamb whose blood painted on the door posts saved the lives of the firstborn of all Israel. This lamb was to be a perpetual sign for Israel until that sign found its fulfillment in Christ. A critical element of this was that no bones of the Passover lamb were ever to be broken. We read of this in Numbers *"They shall leaven none of it until morning, nor break one of its bones."* (Numbers 9:12) and again we read in Exodus *"In one house it shall be eaten; ... you shall not break one of its bones."* (Exodus 12:36). On both of these occasions the Lord emphasized the importance of not breaking the bones of the Passover lamb, and this sign was fulfilled in the crucifixion when first Jesus was not stoned according to the tradition of the Jews and then when the malefactor's legs were broken Jesus' legs were not broken. God's Words and promises were confirmed.

Later, through the Prophet Zechariah, the Lord would make another connection to these events at Calvary: *“And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced.”* (Zechariah 12:10) The Scriptures were fulfilled to the letter in the death of Jesus in a way that could not have been manipulated by Jesus’ followers, or foreseen by Jesus’ enemies. God’s truth was confirmed, Jesus is the Christ promised of old, foreshadowed by Old Testament ceremony, and spoken of by the prophets. In His death the sacrifice for sin was completed and our salvation secured.

The Soldier’s Spear, a Memento of our Savior’s Passion, reminds us of the wound inflicted on our Savior’s body confirming His death as the sacrifice for sin, as well as revealing how Scripture was fulfilled and our salvation secured.

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.”