

April 2, 2021

Good Friday
God's Suffering Servant
Isaiah 53:1-5

Opening words: The word "Tenebrae" comes from the Latin meaning "darkness." The Tenebrae is an ancient Christian Good Friday service that makes use of gradually diminishing light. The extinguishing of the candles symbolizes the events of Holy Week. This increasing darkness symbolizes two things: the approaching darkness of Jesus' death and the hopelessness of living in a world without God. The service concludes in darkness, symbolizing the death of Jesus. Our scripture lesson for this evening is Isaiah 53:1-5. Let me call this message *God's Suffering Servant*.

Isaiah 53:1-6 Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

2 He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

3 He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

4 Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Many years ago, before mankind walked on the moon, before a civil war threatened to divide America, or before Columbus discovered a New World, there was a man who spoke for God. His name means "The Lord is My Salvation," but we simply call him Isaiah. He lived approximately 700 years before the birth of Christ, so he is a contemporary of Amos, Hosea, and Micah. His audience was the people of Judah and Jerusalem. He warned them of their impending judgement. His book is sixty-six chapters long, so many consider him the greatest writing prophet. Those chapters can be divided into two sections. Chapters one through thirty-nine deal with judgement. Chapters forty through sixty-six deal with comfort. Our reading comes from the second section. It is called *God's suffering servant*. Twenty-seven hundred years later, we understand that suffering servant to be Jesus.

The scripture reads like a timeline of Jesus's life. Verse two tells us he was born in the line of Jesse, the father of King David. That is confirmed in the first chapter of Matthew. Physically, there is nothing special about Jesus. Politically, there is nothing special about

Jesus. It is spiritually that Jesus is different from the rest of us. Did you know, according to the United Nations, 385,000 babies are born a day in our world? I have no clue how many babies have been born in the history of this world. However, I do know the baby Jesus was different from the rest. He was the very incarnation of God. In other words, Jesus was God in human form. His biological mother was Mary. Joseph played the role of his earthly father, but he was only his stepfather. Jesus's biological father was God. That uniqueness was not obvious at first. Only Anna and Simeon recognize his uniqueness. (Luke 2:22-40). Everyone loves a baby and Jesus did what all healthy babies do, he grew up.

According to the Gospel of Luke, when Jesus is twelve years-old he gets separated from Mary and Joseph. They had been to Jerusalem for the annual Passover. The time came for everyone to return home. Jesus is old enough to have some independence. They traveled in groups for companionship and protection. They had traveled some distance when it was discovered Jesus was missing. A first century "amber alert" went out, but no one had seen Jesus. The frantic parents return to Jerusalem. Three days later they find Jesus sitting in the temple listening to the teachers and asking questions. The scriptures say everyone was amazed at his understanding.

When Jesus is thirty years old, he goes out to the banks of the Jordan River to be baptized by John. The crowd is thick, because it was a sinner's baptism, and everyone was a sinner. The baptizer recognized Jesus and his uniqueness. He is uncomfortable baptizing Jesus. After all, it was a sinner's baptism and Jesus had not committed a single sin. Jesus encourages him to do it and God reminds the world Jesus is his son. Once completed, Jesus is taken to the wilderness where he is tempted by Satan. It is really no contest. Jesus wins, the angels attend to him, and his earthly ministry begins (Matthew 4:1-11).

Jesus would have made a great United Methodist minister. His ministry lasted three years. However, the ministry does not end because Jesus was not effective. Jesus's ministry ended because Jesus was too effective. He did nothing wrong. He loved everyone. He cared for the forgotten and treated everyone with dignity and respect. He healed the blind and the lame. He confronted and defeated demons. He taught people how to live and gave people hope, because they longed to hear about the Kingdom of God. The people responded to Jesus and great crowds followed him. That was the problem. The great crowds bothered the orthodox leaders of his day. They had too much to lose. Jesus had to die. You know the story.

It all began on Palm Sunday. Masses gathered for the annual Passover. When Jesus arrived, the people were shoulder to shoulder. The number of people is not in question. The only question is why they cheered for Jesus. Some wanted Jesus to lead a political revolution. They had grown tired of foreign rule. Some wanted Jesus to heal a sick or maimed loved one. Some wanted to see Jesus because he was trending. Very few were there because they understood the eternal impact of Jesus. That crowd confirmed the

orthodox leader's fears. They were threatened by Jesus's popularity. A lesser man would have retreated, but not Jesus. He attacked! He went to the temple court and disrupted their profitable business practices. He cursed the fig tree, the symbol of Israel. It was the only thing Jesus ever cursed. Jesus challenged the orthodox leaders of the faith and they retaliated. They looked for the weakest link and found him, Judas Iscariot. He betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver and the dominos began to fall. Jesus was arrested after supper on Thursday evening. He was tried twice. First by his own people, who lacked the power to execute him. Second, he was tried before the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilot, who had the power to execute him. He used that power to send Jesus to the cross because he wanted to appease the crowd. Surrounded by two common criminals, one on his right and the other his left, Jesus died on a Roman instrument of execution, a cross. His death is hard to imagine because his death was hard to watch. There is no other way to say it.

Jesus, the incarnation of God, was dead. The life that began in the manger thirty-three years earlier was over. Mary must have been overwhelmed with emotions. She had to face that horrible hour alone. She must have missed Joseph, long gone. Now Jesus was gone too. The same eyes who saw the face of God in the manger saw the son of God die. Can I state the obvious? Parents should never outlive their child. It was hard for Mary to accept, but Jesus's death was part of God's plan for the salvation for the world. Here is a question you must answer.

Why did Jesus have to die? There are many reasons why Jesus had to die. However, let me give you just three for you to consider:

- 1. Jesus died to give eternal life to whoever believed in him.** John 3:16 says, *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have eternal life."* In the Christian faith, we believe Jesus is our only hope of salvation. If you do not believe in Jesus, then the fires of hell are waiting for you. If you have never accepted Jesus into your heart, then do not wait. Death is a heartbeat away. Jesus had to die!
- 2. Jesus died to save you from the curse of the law.** Galatians 3:13 says, *"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming cursed for us."* If you believe your salvation can be earned, then you are a fool. Your only hope of salvation is Jesus. His sinlessness made him the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world. His sinlessness made him the perfect sacrifice for your sins. Never forget, we are saved by grace and by grace alone. Jesus had to die!
- 3. Jesus died to end religion and bring us to a personal relationship with God.** Christianity is not a religion. It is a relationship with God. That is why the faith must live in your heart. None of the other world religions can make such a boast. Do you remember what the scriptures say? Jesus tore the

veil at the temple from top to bottom, so we can have a personal relationship with God. Jesus had to die!

There is an old preaching story that has been circulating for years. I first heard it in the hills of the Bluegrass State. The story is about a young curious boy, who loved his father. Every day he asked his father if he could go to work with him. Every day, the father turned him down. Yet, every day he asked his father and, in time, the father agreed. The boy was thrilled, but the father warned him it was going to be long day for him, and he had to stay out of the way. The father was the bridge operator for the local railroad. The bridge remained up until the train came, filled with passengers. When the train arrived, the father would pull the levers to lower the bridge. When the father and son arrived at the bridge station, the son studied everything in detail. The father did his best to explain how everything worked. The father was right, it was a long day for the little boy. In time, the father got busy, and the little boy got bored. When the time came to lower the bridge, the train blew its whistle. The father grabbed the lever to lower the bridge and glanced back at his son. There was only one problem. The boy was not with him in the office! The father looked out the window and looked at the bridge. There in the cogs of the bridge was his son. The father was in a no-win situation. If he pulled the lever to lower the bridge, then he would kill his son. If he did not pull the lever to lower the bridge, then he would kill the passengers on the train. What would you do? Would you pull the lever to save the passengers, killing your son? Would you save the boy, killing the passengers? Let there be no doubt about it. God pulled the lever on Good Friday. Jesus died, so we could live. May we never question the depth of God's love. The story ends with the father crying. He had just killed his son. With tears running down his face, he watched the passengers crossing the bridge. Most waved and smiled at him because they did not know the sacrifice he had made for them. It has been said, *we are not saved by what we do, we are saved by what Christ has done.* And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"