

Good Friday
Sermon Text: Isaiah 52:13-53:12
Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:7-9
John 18:1 through 19:42
Date preached: March 29, 2013

It was a violent death. His death was preceded with scores of people shouting praise. It was preceded a deep reverence for God's earlier work as He and his followers celebrated Passover. It was preceded with prayer so deep and earnest that Jesus sweated blood. It was preceded with the betrayal of one of his closest followers, while another denied knowing him, and the rest scattered in fear.

A vivid picture of the events that immediately follow is prophesied by Isaiah. Isaiah 53 is one that should certainly leave us feeling uncomfortable. Jesus endured the brutality of everything sin, death and the devil could throw at him. All this was for us.

In the movie, the Passion of Christ, the depiction of the crucifixion is one of the things that people criticized. Some felt it went over the top. Yet I wonder from our Lord's perspective if it even came close to what he actually endured. I don't know that answer.

What I do know as revealed in Scripture is that Jesus endured this path to spare us. The brutality should leave us shaken, for we bear this responsibility. But

does it? Do we simply look upon this as a past event without making the connection that it was for our sin that Christ endured this violence, shame and humiliation? In our world today, have we grown so used to hearing of violence in our society that it no longer shocks us?

The violence that we experience in our world today has no redeeming value. There is no redeeming value in derogatory comments, or in supporting those things which lead us to death. The violence we see throughout our communities and across the world does nothing to save us from the violence of the devil. Such violence destroys families, communities, businesses, nations, and leaves us without hope.

Were it not for Jesus, this would be our fate. We would be hopeless against one who takes delight in useless suffering.

What is meant by useless suffering? Useless suffering is that which we endure from our own sinful behavior. Useless suffering is one that we bring upon ourselves and is divorced from faith in God.

This is different from the suffering we find described in Scripture that believers will face as a result of faith

in Christ. In the fifth chapter of Romans we find there words that connect our suffering to the saving faith in Christ. “Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”

Through the violence of the cross, Jesus delivers us from the violence of hell. He is the one who exchanges the best of God, for the worst of humankind. The result of this delightful exchange leaves us whistling joyfully without a care in the world.

This is plainly taught in the Confessions of the Lutheran Church. For in the Apology (meaning defense) of the Augsburg Confession, Article four it is written,

“Paul teaches this in Galatians 3:13 when he says, ‘Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us,’ that is, the law condemns all people, but by undergoing the punishment of sin while remaining sinless and becoming a sacrifice for

us, Christ has taken into himself the right of the law to accuse and condemn those who believe in him, because he himself is the atoning sacrifice for them, on account of which they are not reckoned righteous.”

For Christ did the hard part. He paid the price. He was obedient, while we are far from it. His obedience was to make right our relationship with God.

That is what this night is all about. Again from Romans 5:8 “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Christ endured the violence, shame and disgrace of the cross that we may rejoice in the pure, peaceful, steadfast love of God that delivers us from every evil thing.

Through his selfless love, there is hope for us on this dark night.