

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Fifth Sunday in Lent, March 13, 2016

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 171:1-7, 176:1-2, 169, 173, 175.

Lessons: Job 16:10-11, Hebrews 9:1-14, The Passion History Part 5*

Sermon Text: Matthew 27:31-54.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Each Sunday we confess that we believe that Jesus Christ “was crucified, dead, and buried”, and on Communion Sundays, that he “was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried.”

And that is often the extent of what we think about Jesus’ crucifixion. But there is a great deal of meaning and suffering and pain in those simple words. Although we cannot examine every aspect and detail of Jesus’ crucifixion in just one sermon, today let’s take another look at

THE CRUCIFIXION

- 1. This was excruciatingly painful for our Lord Jesus Christ.**
- 2. He endured it willingly, and**
- 3. He did it for us, in our place, on our behalf.**

Among “civilized” people, crucifixion is no longer used as a means of execution. It would certainly be considered cruel and unusual punishment, inhumane, and barbaric.

But that is the way that God chose to redeem mankind from sin. Because God is omnipotent and omniscient, he could have chosen any way at all to redeem mankind from sin. Scripture plainly tells us that **“the wages of sin is death”** Romans 6:23 (NIV) and temporal death and eternal death was the fate of mankind. But God had warned Adam and Eve not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden **“for when you eat of it you will surely die.”** Genesis 2:17 (NIV) Unfortunately, Adam and Eve learned the hard way what that meant, even seeing and feeling some of the first effects of that decree of death.

But God did provide a way out of eternal death. He told Satan, who had taken the form of a serpent, **“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”** Genesis 3:15 (NIV) The King James Version reads that the seed of the woman **“shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”**

It was only as God revealed more of his Word to mankind that we learn about that ‘bruising of the heel’ of the Savior. And it is in today’s sermon that we look at the final “bruising” or “striking” which killed our Savior on the cross.

Pilate had given up on releasing Jesus, even though he knew it was out of envy or spite or just plain hatred that the leaders of the Jews delivered him to Pilate and claimed that he deserved death for what he had done wrong.

But you know that Jesus had done nothing wrong. Paul writes **“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God”** 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV) and Peter affirms the same truth: **“He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.”** 1 Peter 2:22 (NIV)

The mockery of the soldiers moved from Pilate’s palace to another place, Golgotha, the place of the skull. That place could have gotten its name from the picture of holes in a rocky cliff that looked like a skull, or that it was the place, perhaps littered with bones and skulls, where terrible criminals were crucified and their bodies were abandoned.

Roman Catholic churches – and some other churches – have what they call the 14 “stations of the cross”, which is artwork in a sequence on the walls of a church or even along a path, which are to represent events related to Jesus’ crucifixion. Such displays may help one ponder Jesus’ crucifixion, but only these 8 events are plainly found in Scripture: 1) Jesus is condemned to death, 2) he carries his cross, 3) Simon of Cyrene carries the cross after Jesus falls, 4) he talks to the women of Jerusalem, 5) he is stripped of his clothing, 5) he is nailed to the cross, 6) he dies on the cross, 7) he is taken down, and 8) he is laid in the tomb.

It was part of the punishment that condemned prisoners must carry their own cross to the place of execution. This kind of spectacle was intended to serve as an example and a warning and help deter crime.

It was on his way to the cross that Jesus collapsed. He was no doubt exhausted and in extreme pain. The Roman soldiers then grabbed a bystander, Simon of Cyrene, to carry his cross. Cyrene is a city in North Africa. Simon would have been in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover.

On this journey of perhaps one-half to two miles, Jesus was met and seen by women of Jerusalem who were weeping for him. They surely felt pity and sorrow for the man who was suffering so much. But Jesus tells them, as Luke records: ***“A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them, ‘Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, “Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!” Then “they will say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us!’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us!’” For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?’”*** Luke 23:27-31 (NIV)

Jesus would be referring first to the coming destruction of Jerusalem, which is plainly also a picture of God’s coming judgment, when Jesus will judge the living and the dead. The secular historian Josephus paints a horrible picture of the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 A.D., 47 years later, when surely children of these women would be living, and perhaps some of these very same women might be living to see such carnage and destruction. How horrible it would be! But even more horrible would be judgment day, when the world would be destroyed and hellfire and damnation will come upon unbelievers.

The green wood, or green tree compared to dry wood is a bit more difficult to explain. In this we can see a picture of a young man in his early 30s, strong, and healthy before he was captured and beaten and scourged, compared to others, not so healthy, but older, dryer. We also see the Son of God who is able to endure such suffering as he did – compared to eternal suffering that unrepentant, impenitent, unbelieving sinners will endure eternally. We could also think of the coming destruction of Jerusalem, little more than a generation away.

Two thieves are also crucified with Jesus. In these two men we see the difference among humans. Some mock Jesus and want nothing to do with him to the very end. These are the unrepentant, impenitent. In the other one, who realized that he was in the same boat as Jesus and was going to die and turned to Christ with words of repentance, Jesus promised him he’d see him in the kingdom of heaven that very day. In this, we who have had the Gospel all our lives don’t find an excuse for doing everything our sinful flesh wants to do until we are on our death bed. Instead we see the boundless grace of God can extend to those who have never heard the Gospel previously.

At the place of crucifixion, Jesus is stripped of his clothes and nailed to the cross. This was especially humiliating and degrading to the Jews, who knew from God’s Word that such public nakedness was a shame. In Jesus’ nakedness we can get a glimpse of ourselves before God – all our sins are laid bare before God. We cannot hide before the all-seeing eye of God. But it is in Jesus’ blood and righteousness that our sins are covered.

And the horrible sight and sounds of Jesus being nailed to the cross! Can you imagine nails being pounded through hands and feet? They were probably pounded through the wrists at the bottom of the hands in order to support the weight of a body. Artists and hymn-writers and even movie-makers have tried to portray the agony of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, our Lord. But no such representation can really show the real pain and horror of it all. It should lead us to look on our sins with horror, for they caused all this! Remember why it was done. He died so that we might live!

Pilate had a label put up on the cross: This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. Such a label was intended to present the crime of the one crucified as a warning to the people. So ***“The chief priests of the Jews***

protested to Pilate, ‘Do not write “The King of the Jews,” but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.’ Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.” John 19:21-22 (NIV) In this one thing Pilate remained insistent.

Those who passed by hurled insults at him and blasphemed, including the soldiers and religious leaders of the Jews. Even the two thieves who were crucified with him mocked him – until one repented.

Then, after he was nailed to the cross were more than six long hours before he died! Physiologically, the cause of death, when one is crucified would be suffocation. The weight of the body hanging by the hands would eventually force the lungs to collapse, preventing breathing; and the body could no longer support life as the victim lost strength. But we know that wasn’t the real cause of Jesus’ death. The real cause of his death wasn’t just the weight of his body but the weight of our sins, crushing the life out of Jesus, our Savior.

After Jesus had been on the cross for three hours, darkness came over the earth for three hours! People all over Jerusalem had to know that something most unusual, strange, and terrifying had taken place and was happening.

After six hours and seven brief statements from the cross, Jesus died.

“At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.” When he died, the curtain of the temple, separating the Holiest Place from the Holy Place was torn in two. This was the curtain behind which only the High Priest could go, and then only once each year, on the Day of Atonement. This curtain had separated the Holy God from sinful people. His death for our sins had opened up the way for us to approach God. Jesus broke down that barrier, for everything had been completed for the salvation of mankind.

“The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus’ resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.” Here we have a foretaste of the resurrection of Jesus from the grave. What a terrifying thing this must have been on this day for the people who saw it. But Scripture says no more about these believers who were raised from the dead. **“When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, ‘Surely he was the Son of God!’”** Matthew 27:51-54 (NIV)

Isn’t it remarkable that even a Roman soldier would acknowledge that Jesus was the Son of God! This is something that many of the Jews, Jesus’ own people, who had received the prophecies of God foretelling this would happen in this way didn’t believe.

So, is the death of Jesus the end? For any human without Christ it would be – until the final judgment, when an even more horrible death would take place – the beginning of eternal damnation, unending punishment, and eternal death.

But there is really a hopeful conclusion. We must look beyond the cross to the empty tomb. On the third day after he was dead and buried, Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God came back to life!

So these events we have talked about today aren’t the end. Jesus will come back to life. He will rise from the dead. The Word of God assures us that **“He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.”** Romans 4:25 (NIV)

Because of that fact, we can joyfully sing

“I know that my Redeemer lives;
What comfort this sweet sentence gives!
He lives, He lives, who once was dead;
He lives, my ever-living Head.
“He lives, all glory to His name!
He lives, my Jesus, still the same.
Oh, the sweet joy this sentence gives,
‘I know that my Redeemer lives!’” Amen! (The Lutheran Hymnal, 200)

* For the text of The Passion History, go to the [Weekly Sermons](http://www.lutheranlccf.org) page of the LCCF Website, www.lutheranlccf.org