

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Holy Week, April 9 & 10, 2020**  
**Maundy Thursday & Good Friday**

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

Hymns: 169, 172:1, 176, 165, 172:8-10.

Lessons: Isaiah 52:13-53:12, 3, 1 Peter 2:21-25, Mark 15: 42-46.

Sermon Text: Isaiah 53:8-9

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

During the 40 days from Ash Wednesday until Easter we are privileged to have special worship services to review the sufferings and death of our Savior Jesus Christ, the Servant of the Lord. It is during Holy Week, including Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, that we remember that all that Jesus had to accomplish in his life on earth now is really finished, as he said on the cross just before he died. Tonight we hear again that

**THE SERVANT OF THE LORD REACHES THE END OF HIS LIFE ON EARTH**

1. **He was killed; he was cut off from the land of the living; he was executed.**
2. **He was buried – but with honor, not like a common criminal deserved.**
3. **All this happened “*though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.*”**

Listen again to our first verse, first from the King James Version and then from the New International Version: ***“He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living.”*** (King James Version) ***“By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living.”*** (New International Version)

The people chose the murderer Barabbas to be released and the innocent Jesus to be executed. In this way they chose to – or tried to – cut Jesus off from the land of the living. They tried to cut him off and so, he would have no descendants. The intention of sinful people was to end and even wipe out all remembrance of his life through his suffering and death. But it only served to move him from the land of those living in sin – that is, earth – to heaven, where all who believe in him – his true descendants, the Holy Christian Church – will be gathered around him.

This wicked action was done through force and through judicial decree. ***“By oppression and judgment he was taken away.”*** The leaders of the Jews captured him with a large mob in Gethsemane. The Jewish Sanhedrin – the Council of 70 men – condemned him to death, although they did not have the power to execute him. Finally, it was the sentence of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor which caused him to be put to death. Who of the people of his time deplored the fact that he was torn away out of the land of the living? Practically no one.

Tonight we emphasize the death of the Suffering Servant. The judicial authorities – first the leaders of the Jews and then the civil authorities – led him away, and no one could stop his execution. Pilate tried, and when that failed, he symbolically tried to wash his hands of the whole matter. But he didn’t exonerate himself. Pilate and the Jews and even we – all humans – are guilty of his death because of our sinfulness.

At the end of the verse, Isaiah once more gives the reason for this. The servant did all this ***“for the transgression of my people.”*** The word for transgressions which was used earlier in verse 5 means “rebellion” and it is used again here. Our sins have caused this suffering. One writer said that each one of our sins can be considered a nail that pierced the Savior’s flesh or a lash that tore his back. Every sin is an act of rebellion against God, not just a simple mistake against the expectations of human etiquette or human behavior. Every one of our sins deserves the severest punishment from a righteous and holy God. All that we deserved, the Servant Jesus Christ endured.

The one called Jesus of Nazareth was a descendant of David and Solomon, great kings of God’s people. God had promised in Psalm 89: ***“I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant, ‘I will establish your line forever and make your throne firm through all generations.’”*** Psalms 89:3-4 (NIV) In no one

but Christ will the fulfillment of this prophecy be found; since immediately after Solomon's death the kingdom, by and large, lost its dignity and declined. Afterwards the lineage of David was decaying until it at length came to what appeared to be a sad and dishonorable end – as if the generations of David came to an end. In the same sense we must understand the question of Isaiah, **“Who shall declare his generation?”** Jesus Christ seemed to be the end of the genealogy of David. Jesus had fathered no children in an earthly sense. But the psalmist asserts that Christ will survive death so as to be connected with his descendants as well as with his ancestors. And, of course, the members of Jesus Christ are his body, just as Scripture speaks of the Holy Christian Church, all believers. Scripture tells believers: **“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.”** (Galatians 3:26 NIV) There will be some descendants of Christ – believers – who shall be living on earth until judgment day and on judgment day Christ will welcome all believers to live with him forever in heaven, both those still living and those who have already died.

This is accomplished by the eternal power God the Father gave unto Christ. He promised that **“I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”** Matthew 16:18 (KJV) The church will suffer many attacks, but it, the body of Christ, shall endure forever.

**“For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken.”** Again Isaiah says that Christ was stricken **“for the transgression of my people.”** Repeatedly he says **“for the sins of my people.”** Let us not simply pass over Christ’s suffering, but we must always look to its purpose, that it was for the sake of paying for our sins. Scripture says that he was separated, cut off. But he was brought into another life, something no one really understands from the perspective of this life. Not only the Jews are in error when they hope that a Messiah will reign in this world, but also all today who are hoping for some kind of millennium when Christ will rule on earth. In this life Jesus served, preached, and suffered, and then he left this world to go to another place – to heaven to sit at the right hand of God the Father.

**“For the transgression of my people he was stricken.”** The curse of the judgment came upon him. But we are still God’s people through faith in Christ. He suffered and died for me.

When he died, Isaiah prophesied: **“He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death.”** **“And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death.”** This verse points to the burial of the Servant. Notice that he was dead, just as we confess that he “suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried.” He was really dead. He died and was buried. Scripture plainly says so. No one is said to be buried unless he were dead, and so Jesus was to be buried as if he were an ungodly man. In this way Scripture refutes the slanderers who deny that Christ died, and so this too is a strengthening of our faith.

The authorities judged this servant to be wicked and guilty of death. They concluded that capital punishment should be carried out, and it was. Ordinarily such a “criminal” would be buried with other criminals. Yet, even though the authorities would intend to send the Servant of the Lord to a grave with other criminals, God had other plans. The Servant was innocent. After his death, he did not receive a common and dishonorable burial reserved for criminals and enemies of the state. God overruled the customary practice of the Romans. The Servant’s place to be buried was among the rich. Isaiah’s description of the Servant begins with a note of victory. He wrote at the beginning of this “servant” section: **“He will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted”** (52:13). Yes, we admit that Jesus was raised up, lifted up on the cross to suffer and die. But instead of ultimately being a shameful death, this served to highly exalt and honor him.

When Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus took the body of Jesus from the cross, they gave him an honorable burial. Matthew reports: **“As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus’ body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away.”** Matthew 27:57-60 (NIV) John tells it in this way: **“Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate’s permission, he came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus’ body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid.”** John 19:38-41 (NIV)

Note that Matthew described Joseph as a wealthy man. Jesus, who was considered by Jewish and Roman authorities as a wicked man and a rebel, would normally have been buried along with the two malefactors in an

unmarked grave, except for divine intervention. The rich man Joseph of Arimathea intervened with the Roman authorities and had Jesus buried in his own private tomb. ***“He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death.”***

In scripture, the picture of a rich man is sometimes used as a synonym for an ungodly man. It often happens that the rich of this world are ungodly and their riches are often used for ungodly purposes. So Scripture says here that he died like an ungodly man and was buried like a rich man, just as Scripture reports that he was put to death as a rebel and was buried with that disgrace attached to him. The soldiers intended to bury him with the wicked since they considered him a criminal. Instead, he was given an honorable burial in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb.

All this happened ***“though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.”*** We see again the innocence of Jesus. Christ is the true sacrificial Lamb brought to the slaughter, a sheep silent before the shearers. But he attained the goal which he had in mind in this suffering, the purpose for which he came into this world. Sin and misery and the payment for sin tried to bring Jesus down. He fought his way through suffering and death to an endless length of life. This involved, of course, that he was torn away from the land of the living. Because his vicarious obedience demanded this sacrifice, the curse of his people's sins came upon him in executing him. Yet in the hours immediately after his death he received recognition. Men had planned his crucifixion to be a torment with the wicked. They thought they could treat him like the criminals that were crucified with him, throwing his body into some convenient pit. Instead of that, however, he was with the rich in his death, buried like a wealthy man, in Joseph's grave. And this despite the fact that he had done no violence and in his mouth there was no deceit. He was the Holy One of God.

The totally innocent Christ was judged by the Jews to be the most guilty. He who was most innocent and guiltless in his teaching and his life was considered to be the worst sinner. But they really could not pin any sin or crime on him, although they tried. Although he was innocent, yet the Lord willed it that he should take upon himself to be the most criminal of men. Isaiah compares him with all other men, sinners. They are the guilty ones. But Christ alone is not guilty. He alone is righteous and holy. For that reason death could not hold him.

Peter gives us this application: ***“To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”*** (1 Peter 2:21-25 NIV)

The Servant, whom Isaiah had until now pictured as a sheep to be killed and whom he had described as destined for a most shameful death for the sins of others, is to be raised to life again. Here Isaiah says that his oppression and judgment is finished. This cannot be said of a dead person remaining in the grave, but it can be said of one liberated from the grave and brought back to life.

The gospel follows the law. Isaiah chapter 53 is filled with gospel. Isaiah again shows God's claim on his people. They are still, as he said earlier, ***“my people”***. The Lord claimed them by grace, sought them by grace, and cleansed them by the blood of his Son. They are his by grace and grace alone. With the hymn writer we rejoice, as we await his resurrection:

Jesus Christ, our blessed Savior,  
Turned away God's wrath forever;  
By His bitter grief and woe  
He saved us from the evil Foe. (The Lutheran Hymnal 311)

May we never forget that the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ our Lord led to his resurrection and our eternal life through faith in him. Amen.

(Unpublished sermons from this series are available from Pastor Robert Mehlretter at [mehlretter@juno.com](mailto:mehlretter@juno.com) )