

Dave Johnson

Sermon: “He Was Wounded for Our Transgressions” (Isaiah 53:5-6)

Good Friday: April 2, 2010

Yesterday afternoon Melville Krebs and I had the privilege of teaching some of the kids from Christ Church about Holy Communion, and as we talked about Jesus’ death on the cross on Good Friday, one of the kids’ commented that Good Friday is good for us because it was bad for Jesus. Of course, she was right.

Jesus’ death on the cross on Good Friday is the heart of the Christian faith, as Paul wrote in his First Letter to the Corinthians: “For I handed on to you what as of *first importance* what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures” (15:3).

In his classic book, *The Cross of Christ*, Anglican priest and scholar John Stott discusses the primary emblem of Christianity. It is not a manger, like the one in which Jesus was born. It is not a carpenter’s bench like the one on which he learned his trade. It is not a rock like the one rolled away from the tomb. The primary emblem of Christianity is “a simple cross,” because the early Christians “wished to commemorate as central to their understanding of Jesus neither his birth nor his youth, neither his teaching nor his service, neither his resurrection nor his reign, nor his gift of the Spirit, but his death, his crucifixion” (p. 21). The cross is the primary emblem of Christianity because it reminds us of what happened on Good Friday, when Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died to save us.

Our service today includes the moving passion hymn, *O Sacred Head, Sore Wounded* by the seventeenth century German hymn writer, Paul Gerhardt. Verse 3 emphasizes why Jesus died on the cross:

In thy most bitter passion my heart to share doth cry,
With thee for *my salvation* upon the cross to die.

Jesus died on the cross for our salvation. He died to save us. This is true for us corporately, and it is also true for us individually—“for *my salvation* upon the cross to die,” Gerhardt wrote—or as Paul wrote in his Letter to the Galatians: “I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved *me* and gave himself for *me*” (2:20).

Jesus died on the cross to save us. This is not just the message of the New Testament, but the Old Testament as well, as today I’m preaching from Isaiah 53:5-6.

Isaiah was a wealthy man whom God called to be a prophet to Israel, who at that point in her history was embroiled in immorality and idolatry. His ministry occurred in the late eighth century B.C. and lasted over forty years. During Isaiah’s ministry the Assyrian king Sennacherib

besieged Israel. The siege lasted for three years and caused unspeakable suffering. Isaiah continued his ministry in the midst of this suffering but eventually was killed under the evil king Manasseh. According to tradition Isaiah was sawn in two by a wooden saw (see Hebrews 11:37—“they were sawn in two”).

The book of Isaiah contains four passages known as Servant Songs (42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-9; and 52:13-53:12), which contain prophecy about the coming Messiah, the Suffering Servant, Jesus Christ, who, Paul tells us, “emptied himself, taking the form of a servant... and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:7-8). Today’s Old Testament reading is the fourth and best known of these Servant Songs, and Isaiah 53:5-6 tells us what happened when Jesus Christ died on the cross on Good Friday.

In 53:5 Isaiah writes, “But *he* was wounded for *our* transgressions, crushed for *our* iniquities; upon *him* was the punishment that made *us* whole, and by *his* bruises *we* are healed.”

On the cross Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, and punished in our place. Jesus Christ died on the cross for us. God had mercy on us, and Jesus endured death in our place. Listen to how Thomas Cranmer, the architect of *The Book of Common Prayer*, addressed this in his homily, “A Sermon of the Salvation of Mankind” in the *First Book of Homilies*:

“For the more full understanding hereof, it is our part and duty ever to remember the great mercy of God; how that all the world being wrapped in sin by breaking of the law, God sent his only Son our Saviour Christ into this world to fulfill the law for us, and by shedding of his most precious blood to make a sacrifice and satisfaction or (as it may be called) amends to his Father for our sins, to assuage his wrath and indignation conceived against us for the same... (God) hath so tempered his justice and mercy together, that he would neither by his justice condemn us to the everlasting captivity of the devil and his prison of hell, remediless forever without mercy, nor by his mercy deliver us clearly without justice or payment of a just ransom, but with his endless mercy he joined his most upright and equal justice... he provided a ransom for us... the most precious body and blood of his own most dear and best beloved Son Jesus Christ... And so the justice of God and his mercy did embrace together, and fulfilled the mystery of our redemption.”

On Good Friday God’s justice and mercy came together in Jesus’ death on the cross in our place, as Jesus was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, and punished in our place.

Last week my wife, Steph, and I watched the classic 1980 film, *Ordinary People*, which won the Oscar for Best Picture. It is about a wealthy suburban family in the process of being torn apart

by grief over the death of the oldest son, Buck. One day the father, Calvin Jarrett, played by Donald Sutherland, is out running with a friend who is blithering endlessly about various stock quotes while Sutherland suffers silently. Eventually Sutherland's friend veers off and Sutherland begins running alone through some woods. He is so overcome by grief that he stumbles and falls, and is unable to get up. He just sits there, staring at nothing, weighed down by the unspeakable grief of the death of his beloved son. It is a heartbreaking scene.

I believe that God the Father was similarly overcome with grief on Good Friday, that his heart was broken as his beloved Son with whom he was well-pleased, was crushed for us. When Jesus died on Good Friday the earth shook and the sky became dark, for the King of Glory, who had done nothing wrong, nothing wrong at all, ever, was wounded for our transgressions, or as Paul put it, "was handed over to death for our trespasses" (Romans 4:25).

It was not just God the Son who suffered on Good Friday; God the Father and God the Holy Spirit suffered as well as Jesus was crushed for us. In his moving book, *Lament for a Son*, Nicholas Wolterstorff, describes how he felt at the burial of his son, Eric, who had tragically died in a mountain climbing accident at the age of twenty-five:

"I buried myself that warm June day. It was me those gardeners lowered on squeaking straps into that hot dry hole, curious neighborhood children looking down in at me, everyone stilled, wind rustling the oaks. It was me over whom we slid that heavy slab, more than I can lift. It was me on whom we shoveled dirt. It was me we left behind, after reading psalms" (p. 42).

The Holy Spirit also suffered on Good Friday. The same Holy Spirit who had dwelt from eternity with God the Son, who had anointed Jesus, the Suffering Servant as the Messiah, was also present on Good Friday as Jesus died to save us. In his Letter to the Ephesians Paul exhorts us: "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God" (4:30), but on Good Friday we indeed grieved the Holy Spirit because Jesus "was wounded for *our* transgressions" and "crushed for *our* iniquities." On Good Friday the heart of God the Father and God the Holy Spirit was crushed as well.

So in Isaiah 53:5 we see the Gospel, that Jesus Christ, the Suffering Servant "was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities... (and) upon him was the punishment that made us whole."

Isaiah continues, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (53:6).

"All we like sheep have gone astray"—we have all strayed from the straight and narrow and found ourselves lost and broken, unable to help ourselves, out of fuel, out of options. But

thankfully God did not wait for all of us lost sheep to miraculously find our way back to God—good thing, because that’s impossible. Rather, God the Son, Jesus Christ, is the Good Shepherd who sought out us lost sheep, who laid down his life for us lost sheep on Good Friday so that we could be found and brought home.

“We have all turned to our own way”—we have tried to do what we want to do the way we want to do it when we want to do it because we want to do it, utterly regardless of whether or not it is right in God’s eyes. The Psalmist tells us that “God looks down from heaven on humankind to see if there are any who are wise, who seek after God;” but “They have all fallen away, they are all alike perverse; there is no one who does good, no, not one” (53:2-3). Similarly Paul writes, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

But because of what happened on Good Friday that is not the end of the story, for although all of us have gone astray and sinned, God has saved us through Jesus Christ’s death on the cross. And it is solely through faith, through trust in Jesus Christ and his death on the cross for us that we are saved, that we are justified. We are justified by faith alone because of the grace of God given us freely on Good Friday. All of this is captured, again, by Thomas Cranmer in “A Sermon of the Salvation of Mankind.” Cranmer writes:

“Because all men be sinners and offenders against God, and breakers of his law and commandments, therefore can no man by his own acts, works, and deeds, seem they never so good, be justified and made righteous before God; but every man of necessity is constrained to seek for another righteousness or justification, to be received at God’s own hands, that is to say, the remission, pardon, and forgiveness of his sins and trespasses in such things as he hath offended. And this justification or righteousness, which we so receive by God’s mercy and Christ’s merits, embraced by faith, is taken, accepted, and allowed of God for our perfect and full justification.”

Indeed, as Cranmer writes, we receive justification “at God’s own hands,” hands which were nailed to cross on Good Friday, hands which bear the scars of Good Friday even now.

So in Isaiah 53 we see the Gospel, we see what happened to Jesus Christ, the Suffering Servant, the Son of God, on Good Friday. Jesus “was wounded for our transgressions” and “crushed for our iniquities,” and “upon him was the punishment that made us whole.” Even though “All we like sheep have gone astray” and “we have all turned to our own way,” “the Lord has laid on (Jesus) the iniquity of us all.” Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died on the cross on Good Friday to save us, to save you, to save me. This is why the cross is the emblem of Christianity. Good Friday is good for us because it was bad for Jesus.

In response we can only do what Paul Gerhardt wrote in *O Sacred Head, Sore Wounded*, as we pray:

Ah, keep my heart thus mov-ed to stand thy cross beneath,
To mourn thee well-beloved, yet thank thee for thy death.

Amen.