

Lenten Midweek – Evening Prayer

The Death of Christ and Baptism

1 John 5:6-12

John 19:28-37

I'm not sure why it is but it is more painful to see a depiction of Jesus' death than to hear it read aloud (at least for me). To hear it read is certainly painful. A reverent and solemn Good Friday service has a power and a dread and a heartbeat that is unique, both wonderful and horrifying at the same time. It is a curious feeling – having your heart ache with sorrow while at the same time being deeply appreciative of His love. Seeing this great sacrifice depicted on film can easily bring the most stoic believer to tears. The suffering is enormous. The virtue is captivating. The shame that is heaped upon the Lord of glory jars one's senses to the full. This is no game. This is no Hallmark card. This is no vapid pop spirituality. Christ's death is the absolute fulcrum of time, the fulcrum of life, the fulcrum of revelation and hope and truth.

Jesus knew that He was going to be killed. Over and over, in no uncertain terms, Jesus told His disciples what awaited Him in Jerusalem. "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (Luke 9:22). When some Pharisees warned Him that Herod was keen to have Jesus put to death, the Lord Christ was unmoved: "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course'" (Luke 13:32). The third day; isn't that our joy, our hope and the source of every freedom your soul has ever known? The third day – resurrection, life, heaven. The third day – death has no sting, disease has no power, as Scripture promises: "[whatever difficulties we must endure] in this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Romans 8:18).

We walk by faith. We know that Jesus is risen from the dead. We haven't seen Him but we love Him (1 Peter 1:8). We love because His love has been breathed into us – breathed into us by an inspired Word, breathed into us by the Holy Spirit, breathed into us by water and the Word. A soldier was allowed to ram his spear into the side of the Son of God. A man just like any of us, ordinary, common; that fallible mortal man was allowed to thrust his lance into the holy flesh of Incarnate God. Jesus welcomed that spear. He had long anticipated its penetration into His corpse. The Lord Christ saw beyond that bleak Friday afternoon at the Place of the Skull. Jesus saw the life He wanted to share and He saw how He would share it. He saw you. He saw His church. He saw a new creation.

Two of the most intriguing people in the Gospel of John are the Woman at the Well and Nicodemus the Pharisee. Jesus pulled those two people to Himself that we might learn who we are. The Samaritan woman was a religious outcast. Not only was she a descendant of the wrong kind of people, she was a woman who bounced from man to man, her self-respect was at low tide along with those who knew her and distanced themselves from her. Jesus asked her for a drink. This unnamed woman hemmed and hawed about propriety between Jews and Samaritans. Jesus dismissed such protocols. He told her what He tells you. "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water" (John 4:10). This marvelous and archetypal woman, this archetypal human

being – she asked the question that St. John is salivating to answer: “Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?” (John 4:11).

Where does Jesus get that water, the water that washed you of your sin? Where does Jesus get that living water, the water that washed you of your filthy rags, the water that drowned the old, sinful nature, the water that slakes your thirst for righteousness, the water that buoys this church to heaven like the water that saved Noah and his kin (1 Peter 3:18-22)? Living water, water alive with Life’s blood, comes flowing from His side. Death gives rise to baptism. Death opens heaven. Death is how Jesus brings you living water. Where would we be without Jesus and His death? Is Good Friday the cornerstone of your life or is it not? Is the Lord and His mighty resurrection the interpretive reality for who you are as a man, as a woman or is it not? You are the Baptized people of the risen King. He procured living water for you by dying on a wretched cross. That living water makes you new. By way of living water Jesus shares His life with you, makes you holy. The well was certainly deep.

Suffering for the sins of the whole world was the well from which the Father had His Son drink. The well was deep. That suffering was the predicate for who you are now. You are beautiful. Every Christian is remarkably beautiful for Christ’s suffering is eternally radiant and that suffering is in you. Death has made you radiant; Christ’s death and the water which poured from His side makes you radiant. There is nothing on this planet that compares with holiness and Christ has made you holy. That Samaritan woman is me. Remarkably, the Lord of glory wants to give me living water. His cross proves it. You and me – we need what He provides. Jesus told Nicodemus, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). You are born of your mother. My mother died. I can visit her grave. She loved me mightily, as much as any mother could. She could not save me. She could not save herself. God gives me, gives you, new birth. Born from above, you are born of water and the Spirit. Christ’s death is the animating feature of your new birth. Christ’s resurrection is the divine vigor that is alive in you. He has loved you more than your mother, more than any human could love. You can’t visit His grave and mourn for the tomb is empty. The third day His tomb was empty and that will never, ever change.

Our baptismal font is the womb of life in this place. When Jesus gave up His Spirit in death, He intended to fill this holy house, and you, with that very Spirit. We are children of God. We are disciples of Christ. We are followers of the Way – we live in truth, obeying His commandments and sacrificing ourselves for others. This is a beautiful life. Our lives are consequential. Love is abundant in our lives for Christ is active through His Word and you continue to be the baptized children of God. At creation, the first day, the Spirit of God hovered over the waters as God said: “Let there be light” (Genesis 1:2). God’s creative will, His creative love, reaches its apex as water and blood pour from Jesus’ body immediately after He gave up His Spirit. That’s what makes your life consequential. He is never absent from you. His life is larger than this world, larger than death, larger than any obstacle you can imagine. “There are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree” (1 John 5:8). What is their testimony? That we have life in the Messianic King – we have life in Christ the King.