

In nomine Jesu

JESUS' WAY TO RESCUE SINNERS FROM THEIR SINS

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

Our sermon for this second Wednesday of Lent is taken from our inspired readings for the first and second Stations of the Cross, with our thoughts centered by the following translated verses:

Therefore, then, he handed Him over to them that He might be crucified. They taking Jesus alongside therefore, and bearing the cross for Himself He went out into the one being called, "Place of Skull," the one which is called (in) Aramaic, "Golgotha." ¹

Today, those words continue this year's Lenten weekday theme as it was summed up in the prayer of this season:

We adore You, O Lord Jesus Christ, in this Church and all the Churches of the world, and we bless You, because, by Your holy Cross You have redeemed the world. Amen.

Those words of adoration recognize that it is Jesus alone Who bore the Tree of Death that it might become the Tree of Life for all who look to Him in the Faith. The Way of the Cross is Jesus' Way to rescue sinners from their sins; His suffering and death which buy you back from death and hell itself.

Through nine Stations which will go up on the walls of this building over the next few weeks of Lent, the Church will have visual reminders of the Way of Jesus' Sorrows. The value of the Stations of the Cross is that they assist the faithful hearer of the Word to make a small physical journey, a spiritual pilgrimage through visual images, to the chief scenes of Christ's Way of suffering unto death. He took that Way, not for

¹ John 19:16-17.

Himself, but for all sinners, for all time. While Jesus' Way of the Cross is not foreign to us as hearers of the Word of God, especially during Holy Week each year, its depiction in images has sadly become unfamiliar to contemporary Lutherans.

To offset that, here today, due to the gifts and memorials of Catalina Lutheran members and friends, visual images of Christ's Way of the Cross are being introduced to this building. For some of you, they are familiar depictions found in churches of your youth. For others, they will be a new help in remembering that which Jesus did to buy you back from sin, death, and hell itself.

Those images, and the ones which will follow them on our walls, are all biblically defensible. They will be introduced over each of the next three weeks with the biblical texts that represent accompanying their display. Then, in the fifth and sixth weeks of Lent, they all will, God-willing hang for your personal devotion and use throughout the years to come. As individuals, you will be welcome to make use of them throughout the years in order to reflect upon and contemplate the reality that Jesus' Way of the Cross is for you. You will notice that Jesus is the center of all the images.

Christians have been walking representations of Christ's "Way of the Cross," either in Jerusalem or in special locations in consecrated spaces since at least the early fourth century AD. Early visitors' records of retracing Jesus' path from Pilate's seat on the Stone Path to a Garden Tomb can be dated to as early as 330. (Remember, Christianity was not a legal religion in the Roman empire until Constantine began to remove

prohibitions against it in AD 316-318. The worship of Jesus the Christ did not become the “official” religion of Rome until AD 325. Up until that era, Christians, and the Church had been repeatedly persecuted by Gentiles and Jews alike).

So, today, we have the first two of nine stations displayed. Number one is Jesus standing before Pilate in judgement, and number two is depicts Jesus receiving His cross. These two find their basis in the theme text with which this sermon began, namely:

Therefore, then, he handed Him over to them that He might be crucified. They taking Jesus alongside therefore, and bearing the cross for Himself He went out into the one being called, “Place of Skull,” the one which is called (in) Aramaic, “Golgotha.”²

Station one depicts a bound, thorn-crowned Jesus standing before Pontius Pilate with a guard in attendance. He has been heralded, in cruel jest, as “King of the Jews,” by the soldiers who had attended to His punishment of 39 lashes with cords laced with bits of bone, steel and glass. He has been arrayed in royal purple, and been beaten about the face. Pilate has called out to the crowds, “Behold the Man!” concerning the One Who so often referred to Himself as, “The Son of Man.”³ That was the title long associated with the expected Israelite Messiah. In addition, throughout the three preceding years, Jesus had repeatedly attached the Name of God to Himself, “I I AM.”

The beaten, purple-clad, thorn crowned Man was not the Messiah the Jews desired. He had no visible armies. He did not cut an imposing figure. He owned nothing, in human terms, except the clothes on

² John 19:16-17.

³ John 19: 5

His back. He was a nobody. Jesus was not the conquering King the Jews had been taught for centuries was coming.

(Here remains the warning for us: beware the Jesus, the King of Kings you desire. Ensure that your thoughts are in line with the whole revelation and revealed counsel of God). Jesus was a man of sorrows. He was a leader by the Word, not then did He bear the sword of vengeance against His enemies. Yet, He had repeatedly claimed to be One with God.

On that account, the religious leaders of the Jews repeatedly called out for Pilate to render capital punishment to this Man they considered to have cursed His God by claiming to be God. This was the Mosaic Law they wanted applied, though they could not do it themselves for Rome had reserved the right to the death penalty for her judges alone:

The one blaspheming the Name (of) YHWH, death he shall die, stoning they stone against him, all the congregation, (even so for) the sojourner as (for the) native, in his blasphemy (of the) Name he shall be put to death.⁴

The High Priests, their assistants, and the Jews with them knew that. So, when Pilate tempts them to break Roman Law by putting Jesus, the Man he was convinced was innocent, on the Cross themselves, they responded according to their Law:

We have Law; and according to the Law He has (a) debt to die, because He made Himself Son of God.⁵

In a manner now being repeated about innocents in our era, Jesus was held to have “a debt to die.” He was inconvenient to the leaders of His own people. He had outlived His usefulness, and it was time for Him to go!

⁴ Leviticus 24:16.

⁵ John 19:7.

Pilate would not have been concerned at all with the charges of blasphemy against YHWH. Yet, the title applied to Jesus, “Son of God,” brought fear to Pilate. He knew that in Rome that title was given to the legitimate son of Caesar, the rightful Emperor. Yet, the title did not match the image of the bruised, beaten, and humiliated Man before him.

Pontius Pilate’s job was to ensure that the rule of Rome was enforced, that the Emperor alone ruled supreme. That is one reason why those arrayed against Jesus took up a chant that was sure to move Pilate to action. They latched on to that which would surely get Jesus convicted, that He claimed, and others hailed Him to be, “the King of the Jews.” They appealed to Pilate that, should he make the “wrong” decision, that which was the right decision but against their collective national he would *not remain friend of the Caesar; everyone (who) makes himself the king speaks against the Caesar.*⁶ They had backed the governor into a dangerous corner in this trial. Their charge, should it get to Rome, could not only cost Pilate his job, and future promotions, but his life!

So, governor took his seat, in the place of Judgment – depicted in the image of the First Station of the Cross. He declares the charge against Jesus, “Behold the King of all of you!” He certainly was not the King those unbelieving Jews wanted. So, they cried out that Jesus should be given the punishment reserved for those who committed capital offenses. To them, he was an insurrectionist, one who was inciting to terror against their rule, a man worthy of death. He was not the Messiah they wanted.

Yet, He is your Messiah, the One anointed by God to bear your sins. So, to enact the will of God, Jesus was handed over to death, a death

⁶ John 19:12.

reserved for murderers and the like. Jesus gets the sentence your sins bring upon you for every large and small violation of His will – revealed here in stone for you to see every time you enter this place of God’s grace. Our text reads:

They taking Jesus alongside therefore, and bearing the cross for Himself He went out into the one being called, “Place of Skull,” the one which is called (in) Aramaic, “Golgotha.”⁷

The second station depicts Jesus lifting up open arms, empty hands, to receive the Cross your sins deserve. He willingly takes that instrument of death onto Himself, and begins to bear it, with all your sins upon Himself, to the appointed place, for the foreordained hour.

He does so that you need not bear any of your transgressions against God’s Holy Word. Jesus carries the accursed tree that the curse be borne away from you. He goes willingly to His death that you may live. He is the Messiah, the Christ, of the Scripture, the true King of all Israel Old and New by Faith. Here you may behold the Man, your King, on His Way to reign in victory on the accursed cross!

The peace which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Lent I Wednesday (Stations of the Cross 1 & 2)

Psalm 22: 9-13; Leviticus 24:13-16; John 19:1-17

February 25, 2015

Paster Michael A. Morehouse

Soli deo gloria

⁷ John 19:16-17.