

4.15.2022 Good Friday

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Isaiah 53:3-12 Psalm 22; Hebrews 10:16-25; John 18:1-19:42

“He was numbered with the transgressors”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

The Christian identification of Jesus with the Suffering Servant of Isaiah goes back to the early church’s understanding of Jesus’ incarnation and his cross. Jesus is the Word made flesh, the one who knew no sin, who became sin in order that he might bear the sins of humanity on the cross. Isaiah’s 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.*”

The Passion narrative is about Jesus being unjustly accused, tried, denied, beaten, condemned and abandoned, and finally crucified with two other criminals. Again, Isaiah writes, “*He poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.*” Jesus was numbered among the transgressors so that he could bear and forgive the sins of many from the cross.

Isaiah’s theological meaning is clear; Jesus willfully suffered for the sins of all humanity, because “*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.*” None of us are left out of these words of Isaiah; the cross of Jesus is for all of us, for we are all numbered among the transgressors. None of us is free of the charge of sin, and so today we remember the reason that God became human in Jesus. Jesus was born for this; he became human like us. Jesus became our forgiveness.

Jesus was comparatively young when he died, about 33 years old. We might say that he was just getting started in life. Yet he lived in a way that revealed not only great purpose, but that he also knew the purpose of his life. Normally, we would lament the death of someone so young, saying things like, “they had not reached their mature and full potential” – that “they had so much more to give.” Are we aware of our life’s purpose? Are we as prepared to die for others as Jesus?

Jesus did not try to save his life; rather, he was prepared to give his life for the sins of others, even those who crucified him and those who were crucified with him. Jesus identified completely with our humanity. This makes me wonder, “How closely are we able to identify with and live for others?”

All of the other characters in the Passion narrative have very limited scopes of concern about others. They care only about themselves. Caiaphas and the religious leaders clearly thought that it

was better for one person to die for the people – yet none of them volunteered to do so. The religious leaders were clearly tired of Jesus. They were jealous of him and wanted to maintain their own power. Jesus was the perfect sin offering, the perfect scapegoat. The temple police and the soldiers did the violent bidding of the religious leaders who said they were not permitted to put anyone to death, yet they made sure that Jesus was condemned to death.

The Roman governor Pilate, too, was unable to render a just verdict, even though he could find no case against Jesus. The one person who could have saved Jesus was weak and ineffective. Pilate clearly thought that Jesus was a king, but the religious leaders, flattered him, saying, “*We have no king but the emperor.*” In doing so, the religious leaders showed the worst kind of religious compromise with empire and nationalism, placing their religious loyalties not with God, but with imperial and political power.

Jesus’ disciples did no better. He was betrayed by Judas and arrested. Over the next hours, Peter also denied knowing Jesus.

The prophecy of Isaiah is now coming into focus. Over the course of his questioning, Jesus was beaten by the police and by the soldiers. After being struck by the temple police, Jesus said, “*If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?*” The soldiers did no better; they whipped and mocked him, placing a purple robe upon him and a crown of thorns upon his head, pretending to worship him and striking him on the face.

No one in the Passion story was able to do the right thing. Jesus’ Passion begs the question, “Would we have done any better?” Would we have sought to free him? Would we have stood up for Jesus? Would we have stopped the beating and the violence done to an innocent man? Would we have said, “No, not Barabbas; release Jesus. Just give me Jesus.” In the words of Isaiah, “*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.*”

On Good Friday, we remember that like the characters in the Passion story, whenever we remain silent, whenever we choose loyalty to political power rather than to Jesus and to our neighbor, whenever we malign others, or see to it that someone “gets what’s coming to them,” we share in the sins of our forbears; and we share in the suffering of Christ.

On Good Friday, we are asked to stare into the mirror of our humanity and see that empire, soldiers and injustice against the weak and innocent continue down to this very day in every part

of the world. Even when Jesus said from the cross, *“I am thirsty,”* no one showed compassion by giving him water, rather, gave they gave him the vinegar of sour wine.

The Passion story is so utterly complete in its scope that we realize we have heard something like this before. In 1 John, the Evangelist writes, *“Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.”*

In Jesus we see the unseen God. What we do to our neighbor, we also do to Jesus, who will judge us, not upon what we have said, but upon what we have done to our neighbor.

*“All we like sheep have gone astray”* and God has laid upon Jesus the sinfulness of us all.

On Good Friday, we remember Jesus’ death. We remember that Jesus has shown us how to live and how to die by giving our lives for others.

He was numbered among the transgressors; he was numbered among us. Yet Jesus was ready to die – ready to die for you and for me. In dying, Jesus has saved us so that whether we live or whether we die, we are his.

Are you, like Jesus, ready to die?

Are you ready to die to the world and to live for your neighbor? Amen.