

Good Friday – Pastor Rich

He Bore His Own Cross

John 19:17-30

Jesus always knew He had a mission – a task no one else could do. The cross loomed over His life. He told the disciples about it. He told them about the mission and that it included a cross – a crucifixion.

It tells us in the Word that Jesus set his face like flint. In other words, He had a rock hard determination to complete the mission He had been given. Nothing would sideline Him. Even if He had to ignore His bodily needs He would do it so long as it was interfering with this mission. He says for instance in John 4:34, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work.”

Jesus was only 33 years old when He came to the finish line and the completion of His mission. A very young man who was falsely accused, bitterly reviled and yet guilty of no wrong. A healer and helper, a lover of little children, a liberator of people imprisoned by their own sin and guilt, a man who knew God intimately enough to address Him as “Abba,” Daddy, and yet never lost concern for the least and the lowest.

The penultimate of the mission was the horrifying death by crucifixion. This Jesus knew awaited Him. Could He have run away? Oh, yes! He was divine and also human and no human wants to die a torturous death both bodily and mentally. He asked for a reprieve in the Garden of Gethsemane. But the Father said no. For this was an eternal plan set in motion for love of us.

Golgotha, an Aramaic word that translates as the “place of the Skull,” was situated right outside of the walls of Jerusalem. It was a hill where executions took place. It was atop this small hill so people could see and fear the wrath of the Romans. It kept the Jews in check. The place was also the symbol of death – its fearful inevitability. This is the place where Jesus was to carry His own cross.

Many believe that this hill Golgotha was the very hill which Abraham was called to offer his son Isaac. And so we have a picture of Jesus bearing the cross

as Isaac had to bear wood for his own sacrifice at the hands of his father Abraham. Of course, at the last moment Abraham was spared from offering his own son as a sacrifice and instead a substitute was given, a ram. Jesus is like that ram, or as the New Testament says, Jesus is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the whole world. We deserved His death, the punishment for our sins. Instead Jesus takes our sins upon Himself – all of them!

You can't ignore the symbol of the cross. We wear crosses. We have crosses in our church. We have crosses displayed at home. At Grace we give out beautiful crosses. Along the highway enormous crosses are erected.

The cross is a symbol of what sin does. Sin is destructive. Sin wrecks everything. Sin brings death and pain and every vile thing. And what does the Word tell us? It tells us that God made Jesus who had no sin to become sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (II Corinthians 5:21)

We have to know the greatness of Jesus!

In the First World War there was a young French soldier who was seriously wounded. His arm was so badly smashed that it had to be amputated. He was a magnificent specimen of young manhood, and the surgeon was grieved that he must go through life maimed. So he waited beside the young soldier's bedside to tell him the bad news when he recovered consciousness.

When the young man's eyes opened, the surgeon said to him: "I am sorry to tell you that you have lost your arm."

"Sir," said the young man, "I did not lose it; I gave it for France."

No one took Jesus' life, He gave it. And for whom? For people like you and me who have messed up this world and messed up our lives. Who too often don't have a shred of gratitude. We who break the commandments, always excusing ourselves and never realizing we are breaking God's heart. We can't hide from the cross. It exposes our sins and makes a mockery of our self-righteousness.

But of course the cross does something more. The second last thing Jesus said from upon the cross was, "It is finished." Encapsulated in those words is the greatest love one can ever experience. An impossible love. An unending love. A life transforming love.

The three words, "It is finished" are one word in Greek. *Tetelestai* is a commercial word that was written on business documents or receipts in New Testament times to show that a bill had been paid in full. Thus the symbol of a cross should remind us that Jesus has paid for our sins – all of them. He didn't half finish this work. He didn't pay part of the debt. No He paid it all. We are no longer need fear the punishment of our sins. Because His pure and perfect love casts out all fear.

I've always loved what Corrie Ten Boom said in regard to this. She wrote: "In the forest fire, there is always one place where the fire cannot reach. It is the place where the fire has already burned itself out. Golgotha is the place where the fire of God's judgment against sin burned itself out completely. It is there that we are safe."

What should be or better what will be our response to this astonishing love that God has poured down on us? Naturally there will be multitudes of people who don't believe, ignore it or become offended by the very notion that there is a God. But may that not be you.

There was a time when on Good Friday the world came to a stop. School was dismissed, businesses closed, and churches held multi-hour services to lead the faithful through the experiences of that day. It is not like that in 2020 but maybe it should be among us who know what Jesus did for us on that day we commemorate.

Let us acknowledge that our sins put Jesus on the cross. Let us stake our life on His sacrifice for us. Let us worship and follow Him all the days of our life. And may the love of Christ so take hold of our lives that it compels us to no longer live for ourselves but for Him, who carried His cross and died for us.