

The Festival of Good Friday

6 April 2012

Concordia Lutheran Mission

Terrebonne, Oregon

“Christ Suffered for the Sins of Men on Good Friday to Preach and Save through the Good News, the Gospel.”

“He shall see of the travail of his soul, *and* shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.”

Isaiah 53:11

Introduction

What is “good” about Good Friday? After all, Good Friday marks the death of the Son of God on the Cross of Calvary. So, what’s “good” about Good Friday? Good Friday is good not because of what happened to the Son of God, which is dreadful, but rather because what the Son of God endured on the Cross delivers to men salvation and life eternal and glorifies the Son of God.¹

And because this event is in fact good for men and glorifies God and His Mercy, then, it’s not surprising to see it connected with the preaching of the Good News, i.e. the Gospel.² For

¹“The earliest name for this day, ‘Parasceve,’ means ‘Preparation.’ Other names were ‘Day of the Lord’s Passion,’ ‘Day of the Absolution,’ and ‘Day of the Cross.’ The name ‘Good Friday’ is a peculiarly English expression. It reflects the joy of completed redemption and protests against superstitious notions that all Fridays are ‘unlucky’ and that this particular Friday must be shrouded in funereal gloom. Its original meaning may have been ‘God’s Friday.’” The Rev. Dr. Luther Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, pp. 504, 505.

²St. Paul reminds us of this point when he writes: “For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” **I Corinthians 2:2**. Again, St. Paul writes: “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come.”

In addition to what He says here in **Isaiah 53:11** Christ also states again the close connection between the Cross and the preaching of the Good News, i.e. the Gospel. “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of the world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up

God immediately ties Christ's suffering on Good Friday to the preaching of the Good News, i.e. the Gospel, when He says, "by His Knowledge shall My Righteous Servant justify many." Indeed, we see that God saves through the Knowledge of Christ because Knowledge of Christ, namely, the Gospel, justifies.³

Good Friday, then, is Good because it is the Source and Power of the Preaching of the Good News, the Gospel, through which Christ justifies sinners, saves, and gives life eternal.

I. God Atones for the Sins of Men through the Travail of His Soul and, thereby, Saves Men.

A. Christ is satisfied with the Travail of His Soul because the Travail of His Soul brings peace between God and men by atoning for the sins of men.

from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die." **St. John 12:31-33.**

"Concerning this knowledge and its power the prophets have spoken gloriously and clearly prophesied, as in Isaiah 53[11]: 'By knowledge of Him shall He (My Servant, the Righteous One) make many just or righteous.' This means: 'He will redeem them from sins and snatch them from the devil's jaws solely through this: that they know Him and who He is.' ... Likewise, Jeremiah 9[:23-24] says: 'Let no one boast of his wisdom nor of his might nor of his riches' – in short, let no one boast at all – 'but if anyone wants to boast, let him boast in this, that he know Me and knows who I am: the Lord, who does good and establishes righteousness and justice on earth.'" Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 69, pp. 35, 36.

³The Saving Knowledge of God is to know the True God, the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, One God in Three Person, and His Mercy toward fallen men in Christ. "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." **St. John 17:3.** "Therefore, as the dear children and heirs of God, we ought to glory in neither our wisdom, nor strength, nor riches, but in this, that we have the "pearl of great value" (Matt. 13:46), the dear Word, through which we know God, our dear Father, and Jesus Christ, whom He hast sent (John 17:3). That is our treasure and heritage, and it is sure and eternal and better than all worldly possessions. Whoever has this treasure may let others gather money, live riotously, be proud and haughty. Let him not be troubled by such things, though he be despised and poor in the eyes of the world. But let him thank God for his inexpressible gift (2 Cor. 9:15) and pray that he may abide by it." Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 12, p. 161.

"Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." **Romans 3:28.** "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." **Romans 1:16-17.**

The travail of one's soul does not sound good, yet Christ looks upon it and is pleased with it. Why? Christ looks upon the Travail of His Soul with satisfaction because it means He has brought peace with God to men through His Own Suffering for their sins. The prophet Isaiah writes:

He shall see of the travail of his soul, *and* shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.⁴

To be sure, the Travail of Christ's Soul is a dreadful matter. Jesus says:

Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name.⁵

The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard gives us a small glimpse of Christ's Travail of Soul for us and for our salvation:

The garden in which Christ endured these agonies is located in the valley of Jehosaphat, which became a valley of judgment for Christ, because in it God the Lord summoned Christ before His wrathful judgment for the simple reason that He had loaded on Himself the sin of mankind. In that place the sun, moon, and stars kept back their light; that is, Christ found no comfort with His heavenly Father or with His disciples. In sum, He had no star to guide Him; instead, the thick cloud of sorrow encompassed Him, for at this time God the Lord roared out of Zion and let His voice be heard from Jerusalem. Jerusalem had been the city where God the Lord had His hearth and fire, as the Scriptures states in Isa. 31 [v. 9]. There God had viewed His Son in wrath and let His voice issue forth in fury, as if to say: Are you the One who wants to bear all sin of mankind? As a result, shall I summon You before the judgment for everything people have committed against My Law? Do you want to pay for everything of which My honor was robbed by sin? Well then, I, as a righteous Judge, must allow My wrath and punishment to be pronounced over You; I must pour out My fury and ire over You; and I lay upon You such agony as would otherwise have pressed down on the entire world. ... Note well: that is why this agony and terror came to Christ, and that is why – as He descended from the Mount of Olives on Palm Sunday and proceeded to Jerusalem (John 12) – He reminded Himself how what He would

⁴**Isaiah 53:11.**

⁵**St. John 12:27, 28.**

endure soon thereafter, saying: **Now My soul is sad, and what shall I say;** that is, I am in such sorrow that I can say nothing.⁶

Yet, while the Travail of Christ's Soul is dreadful beyond calculation, nevertheless, we must recall and not lose sight of the fact that the final point is that He is satisfied with the Travail of His Soul because it brought about peace with God for men. St. Paul the Apostle writes:

But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition *between us*; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, *so* making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.⁷

The Lutheran Church confesses:

Yes, what more forceful, more terrible declaration and preaching of God's wrath against sin is there than the suffering and death of Christ, His Son? But as long as all this preaches God's wrath and terrifies people, it is not yet the preaching of the Gospel nor Christ's own preaching, but that of Moses and the Law against the impenitent. For the Gospel and Christ were never ordained and given for the purpose of terrifying and condemning, but for comforting and cheering those who are terrified and timid.⁸

Luther writes:

⁶*An Explanation of the History of the Suffering and Death of our Lord Jesus Christ*, tr. Elmer M. Hohle, Malone, TX: Repristination Press, 1999, pp. 64, 65.

⁷**Ephesians 2:13-22.**

⁸*The Formula of Concord, Article V.12, Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, A Reader's Edition*, p. 555, underscore added.

But now bestir yourself to the end: first, not to behold Christ's sufferings any longer; for they have already done their work and terrified you; but press through all difficulties and behold his friendly heart, how full of love it is toward you, which love constrained him to bear the heavy load of your conscience and your sin. Thus will your heart be loving and sweet toward him, and the assurance of your faith be strengthened. Then ascend higher through the heart of Christ to the heart of God, and see that Christ would not have been able to love you if God had not willed it in eternal love, to which Christ is obedient in his love toward you; there you will find the divine, good father heart, and, as Christ says, be thus drawn to the Father through Christ. Then will you understand the saying of Christ in Jn 3, 16: 'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son,' etc. That means to know God aright, if we apprehend him not by his power and wisdom, which terrify us, but by his goodness and love, there our faith and confidence can then stand unmovable and man is truly thus born anew in God.⁹

Because Christ's Travail of Soul brings peace with God to men, Christ is satisfied and joyous with the Travail of His Soul and is the Source of the Good News, the Gospel, proclaimed to all men for their eternal benefit. St. Paul the Apostle writes:

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.¹⁰

B. The Travail of Christ's Soul saves men.

And because the Travail of Christ's Soul was the travail we deserved because of our sins, then, our sins no longer condemn us. And where there is no condemnation for sin, there is life and salvation. St. Paul the Apostle writes:

There *is* therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me from the law of sin and death.¹¹

The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard writes:

⁹*The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, Vol. 1.2, p. 190.

¹⁰**Hebrews 12:2.**

¹¹**Romans 8:1-2.**

Christ is condemned in an innocent fashion so that we might be pronounced absolved. ... Christ's soul was grieved unto death so that we might rejoice forever.¹²

The Travail of Christ's Soul, then, is the salvation and joy of men.

II. Christ Suffered on Good Friday in order to Save Men and Give Life Eternal through the Good News, i.e. the Gospel.

A. Christ suffered the Travail of His Soul in order to save men through His Word and Sacraments, i.e. the Gospel.

And intimately connected with Christ's suffering on Good Friday is the Good News, i.e. the Gospel. The prophet Isaiah writes:

He shall see of the travail of his soul, *and* shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.¹³

By His Knowledge shall Christ justify many. What does that mean? It means that through the preaching of the Good News of the Travail of His Soul for us, He justifies sinners. St. Paul the Apostle writes:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.¹⁴

Here, St. Paul teaches us that the Righteousness of God, which is the Travail of Christ's Soul, *creates faith and just men by faith*. Again, St. Paul the Apostle writes:

Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.¹⁵

¹²*An Explanation of the History of the Suffering and Death of our Lord Jesus Christ*, tr. Elmer M. Hohle, ed. David O. Berger, Malone, TX: Repristination Press, 1999, pp. 10, 25.

¹³**Isaiah 53:11.**

¹⁴**Romans 1:16-17.**

¹⁵**Romans 3:28.**

Christ, then, in the midst of His Passion, was fashioning for us the delivery system of the Fruits of the Travail of His Soul: *God's Word and Sacraments, i.e. the Gospel*. St. Paul the Apostle writes:

... Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.¹⁶

In other words, Christ suffered the Travail of His Soul and died on the Cross for our sins in order to save us through Holy Baptism¹⁷, i.e. the Gospel¹⁸. Luther writes of Christ fashioning the Saving Benefits of Holy Baptism, and, therefore, the Gospel, the Good News, by His Passion:

[H]oly baptism was purchased for us through this same blood, which was shed for us and with which he paid for sin. This blood and its merit and power he put into baptism, in order that in baptism we might receive it. For whenever a person receives baptism in faith this is the same as if he were visibly washed and cleansed with the blood of Christ. For we do not attain the forgiveness of sins through our work, but rather through the death and the shedding of the blood of the Son of God. *But he takes this forgiveness of sin and tucks it into baptism.*¹⁹

When, therefore, we look upon Holy Baptism, or the Holy Communion, or God's Word, we should see the Passion of Christ and the Travail of His Soul. *For by the Travail of His Soul He fashioned these Precious Instruments of Salvation and joy for us.*

¹⁶**Ephesians 5:25, 26-27.**

¹⁷“The like figure whereunto *even* baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” **I Peter 3:21**, underscore added.

¹⁸God's Word and Sacraments are the Gospel: “But let us speak of the word *liturgy*. This word does not properly signify a sacrifice, but rather the public ministry, and agrees aptly with our belief, namely, that one minister who consecrates tenders the body and blood of the Lord to the rest of the people, just as one minister who preaches tenders the Gospel to the people, as Paul says, I Cor. 4, 1: *Let a man so account of us as the ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God, i.e. of the Gospel and the Sacraments.* And 2 Cor. 5, 20: *We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in God's stead, be ye reconciled to God.* Thus the term *leitourgia* agrees aptly with the ministry.” *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV. (XII.): Of the Mass, Of the Term Mass.* 80, 81, Triglotta, p. 411.

¹⁹*Luther's Works*, Vol. 51, p. 325.

Inexorably linked, then, to the Travail of Christ's Soul on Good Friday is the Good News, i.e. God's Word and Sacraments, the Gospel, because Christ suffered on the Cross in order that He may deliver the Blessings of the Cross to us through the Knowledge of that Travail of His Soul to justify us and save us. For this reason, St. Paul writes:

For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.²⁰

B. The Knowledge of the Travail of Christ's Soul gives life eternal.

And where this Knowledge of the Travail of Christ's Soul is manifested, there is life eternal. Jesus says:

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.²¹

Luther writes:

Concerning this knowledge and its power the prophets have spoken gloriously and clearly prophesied, as in Isaiah 53[:11]: "By knowledge of Him shall He (My Servant, the Righteous One) make many just or righteous." This means: "He will redeem them from sins and snatch them from the devil's jaws solely through this: that they know Him and who He is." ... Likewise, Jeremiah 9[:23-24] says: "Let no one boast of his wisdom nor of his might nor of his riches" – in short, let no one boast at all – "but if anyone wants to boast, let him boast in this, that he knows Me and knows who I am: the Lord, who does good and establishes righteousness and justice on earth."²²

Conclusion

The Good News emerges from Good Friday. While indeed the Travail of Christ's Soul on Good Friday is dreadful, nevertheless, this Friday becomes Good when we consider that the Travail of His Soul put an end to the travail of all human souls because of sin. And where the travail of sin ends, there is salvation, joy, and life everlasting.

²⁰**I Corinthians 2:2.**

²¹**St. John 17:3.**

²²Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 69, pp. 35, 36.

For this reason the Good News is inexorably bound up with Good Friday because Good Friday is the Source and Power of the Good News, fashioned by the Travail of Christ's Soul. Through this Knowledge of His Passion and Travail of His Soul He justifies and saves sinners, giving them, thereby life eternal, joy everlasting, and the resurrection of the body.

Amen.