

Good Friday 2017  
The Salutary Gift

There are two things that are made crystal clear on Good Friday. The first is the fact that God takes sin seriously. His wrath toward sinners is real. The sacrificial death of His Son on the cross proves this beyond the shadow of a doubt. The second is the fact that His love for sinners is also real. The cross of Christ also shows the extent of His love, the price He is willing to pay to redeem the fallen sons of Adam.

This is precisely why you need Good Friday. Because it is your nature both to underestimate God's potential for anger and wrath when it comes to your sin, and to become uncertain about God's favor when things go badly in your life.

Even though the Scriptures are full of evidence that God hates and despises sin and punishes it, we often take His forbearance and His long-suffering as proof of the opposite. We look around and see how much wickedness seems to go unchecked and unpunished in the world and in our own lives. And the conclusion that we draw from this is that God must not be all that concerned about sin.

Our culture doesn't offer much help in this regard. Today, no one really likes to talk about God's "wrath." He is a God of love, and that is as far as some churches and teachers will go. In many pockets of Christianity, people have fashioned for themselves a god that is tame, a god that winks at sin, and a god that -- at -- best is disappointed in them when they make bad decisions.

Think about it -- if you really considered your daily violations of God's Commandments as something dreadful and deserving of death and damnation, wouldn't you run to your pastor for Confession? Wouldn't you

seek to be free of your guilt? If you simply took God at His Word and believed Him when He says that the “wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23), then perhaps you would “fear His wrath and not do anything against” His Commandments (Small Catechism).

On Good Friday, we can no longer look at God as someone who merely winks at our sins or simply ignores them. We can no longer brush off our sins and say, “Oops, I did it again.” We are forced to face the reality of what God thinks about sin and what it deserves. If ever there was proof that God takes sin seriously, it was hanging there on the cross on Calvary. It was there in the beaten, bloody, bruised, and dead body of His Son. There God showed the world that He meant it when he said to Adam and Eve: “For in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:17).

When you see Christ hanging on the tree of the cross, you are compelled to see what God really thinks of your lying; your lustful thoughts and actions; your covetous desires; your gossip; your lack of fear, love, and trust in Him above all things; your inclination to put the worst construction on everyone’s words and actions; and your tendency to worry and doubt God’s love and protection. But God did not send His Son to the cross simply to make you feel bad. Good Friday is not a “feel sorry for Jesus” day. Nor is it a funeral for Jesus. Christ willingly drank the cup of suffering for you.

What you see in the cross of Christ—what you ought to see most clearly—is the extent of His love for sinners. If ever there was proof of God’s love, proof of His mercy toward sinners, proof of His desire to save, it was hanging there on Calvary. There the holy God was taking out His wrath and anger toward your sin on His innocent and holy Son so that you would not have to face His wrath for eternity.

But you would not know this merely by looking at the cross, apart from faith. It is only by divine revelation through the mouths of prophets and apostles that you know what was actually taking place on that day. Without this, you would be like those who believed Him to be “stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted” (Isaiah 53:4). You would not know simply by looking at the cross that He was “wounded for our transgressions” and “crushed for our iniquities” (Isaiah 53:5).

You would not have known, unless it had been revealed to you in the Word, that in Christ, “God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them” (2 Corinthians 5:19). This is why Christ made known to His disciples the purpose of His sacrifice in the words by which He instituted the Sacrament of the Altar: “This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:28).

So, it is through the words of Jesus, and His prophets and apostles, that you know and believe that everything that happened on Good Friday was according to God’s own will. As the Prophet Isaiah declared: “Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush Him; He has put Him to grief” (Isaiah 53:10). Every whip, every jeer, every nail driven into the hands and feet of Jesus turned God’s fierce anger away from your sin. As Moses once stood between the wrath of the almighty God and the idolatrous Israelites, so, too, this man, condemned to death by crucifixion, “turned away God’s wrath forever” (*LSB* 627:1).

And as long as we remain in Christ, as long as we remain united to Him by faith, we are safe from God’s all-consuming anger toward sin and unbelief. This is why we run to Christ when we are overcome by our sinful urges. This is why we remember our Baptism, where God buried us and

raised us with Christ. And this is one of the reasons why there is such comfort for Christians in the salutary gift of the Lord's Supper.

Through participation in this sacrificial banquet, you receive the benefits of Good Friday: pardon and acquittal of all your sins. These things were won for you on Calvary. God declared all sin forgiven in Christ's death. But this gift is graciously delivered to you and made your own in, with, and under the bread and wine.

And since Christ has turned away the wrath of His Father toward you by His sacrificial death, now the Father turns to you not in anger, but in love when you come to His holy Table. For your merciful and faithful High Priest, Jesus Christ, has made full atonement for your sins. He has "borne our griefs and carried our sorrows" (Isaiah 53:4).

Today, you can breathe a sigh of relief that the dagger of divine judgment swept past you and landed home in the innocent flesh of Jesus, His Son. You can thank your gracious Lord for unleashing His wrath toward your sin on His Son, thereby cancelling your debt.

You can wake up and go to work each morning not in your sins, but secure in the forgiveness of your sins won for you on the cross and given to you in Holy Communion. You can approach your Father boldly, having been cleansed of your sins through Holy Baptism, knowing that by faith you stand innocent before Him.

That is what the death of Jesus means for you, Dear Child of God. That is why we call this day "Good." It was good that God placed His own Son under a curse, good that the nails were driven into His flesh, good that the spear pierced His side, good that blood and water flowed from Him, good that His head was bowed in death for us. And it is good that He has

turned the cup of His Father's wrath into a cup of blessing for us, which we receive with grateful hearts in His Holy Supper.

“Jesus Christ, our Blessed Savior, Turned away God's wrath forever; By His bitter grief and woe He saved us from the evil foe” (*LSB* 627:1).

May these words, and the words of the Sacrament, give you peace as you celebrate and remember His holy Passion. Amen.