

John 19.18  
Good Friday  
30 March 2018  
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

+ Iesu Iuva +

Beloved in the Lord: grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

Hear again the Word of God from the Gospel according to St. John. "There they crucified Him, and with Him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them."

*Oremus: haec, pater sancte, verba tua sunt, etc.*

With all the March Madness going on these last weeks we've been practically assaulted with images. We watch entire basketball games from start to finish on TV, including the times out. And the newspapers—for those who read them anymore—are chock full of photos. Blocked shots. Dunks. Fouls. It's all there to be seen.

Oddly, though, we give preference to the video, don't we? For most of us, the *Sports Illustrated* images come along a day late and a dollar short.

And yet, give me the artistry of the photographer any day over that of the videographer. Because the task of the photographer is that much more daunting. The videographer captures every going on from whistle to buzzer. Including the times out; the video reviews of the plays; the fans. But the photographer has a tougher job: for the photographer must capture the one image in one split second that tells it all. The narration of an entire 40 minutes in a single freeze frame. Video's good for the news; photographs are true works of art.

That's because photographs concentrate and crystallize. A moment tells all. Nothing in the prior 39 minutes and 59.99 seconds matter in game where the lead has constantly switched except for the game-winning buzzer beater. Capture that, and you've captured the game. Snap the big center stuffing a ball in the face of a shooter to take back possession and start the 10-point run that puts his team on the podium, and nothing else needs to be said.

And the next day the talk isn't going to be about all the lead switches. It's going to be about the only thing that mattered: the game-winning buzzer beater, the blocked shot that turned the tide. That's why the photograph matters.

Tonight, fellow-redeemed, we come face to face with what's truly the only thing that *ever* mattered. For now, the drama's all over.

Far in the rearview mirror the shouts of Hosanna turning ominously to shouts of "Crucify! Crucify!"

Relegated to the cutting room floor the betrayal and arrest. The mockery of a trial before the high priest and the kangaroo court in the praetorium. Heroic Simon of Cyrene drafted into service to carry the cross.

Now the nail-biter back-and-forth orchestrated by Pilate between Jesus, the Son of God, and Barabbas, the rank criminal, doesn't matter.

There's no video to be taken. And all we have left is an image: the image of the crucified Son of God. It's all said and done. This is the only thing worth talking about it.

Because here you see it all. The horror of sin. The horror of death. The horror of utter abandonment by God. And the glory and grace and mercy of God as He truly is. For you see in the crucifixion what kind of God you have.

Here you see a God who in His holiness doesn't shun sin and sinners; who doesn't run headlong from the threat of death and the dying; who will not duck the suffering of hell and the hell-bound.

Instead, behold God in all His glorious holiness, who makes Himself one with sinners.

Behold the eternal, immortal God, one with the dead and dying.

Behold the Him who reigns in highest heaven one with the hellbound.

If you want to know what God is and looks like and does you need no other image than this one: Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. For this is the heart and center of the Christian faith.

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If anyone ever asks you what you as a Christian believe the answer's simple. It's this image. I believe in Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

But even more important, it's what you must tell *yourself*. The whole story is captured right here. This is the image that must be imprinted on your heart. This is the image that must fill your faith. And not just on Good Friday, but every day.

Because here atonement with God is made. Here the wrath of the Father against sin and sinners is meted out—not on you, but on Jesus. Here a Man is made to suffer the utter abandonment of Holy God. Here a Man is subjected to the torturous, punitive death of sinners. And in accord with Jesus' own word, τετέλεσται—"It has been accomplished." Through this perfect death on the Cross the wrath of God is appeased. Propitiation made. Atonement accomplished. For all sins. Of all times. Including yours.

And it is here that faith rests. It is here that faith must rest. God's Son has been crucified. For you.

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There's something called Pascal's wager. You've maybe heard of it. It goes something like this. God, who is reputedly just and righteous, who is above me, and who must be honored, may or may not exist. If He doesn't, and I don't believe in Him, no harm done. If He does exist, and I don't believe in Him, then I've dishonored Him and deserve His wrath. So the only smart wager is to believe He exists.

Many people take a similar line of logic with the death of Jesus. I know God is displeased with sin. I know Jesus died for me. But to make sure I'm alright with God, I'd better be on my best behavior.

But let me ask you, fellow-redeemed: What else are you going to plead before God?

What *thing*, now that the Son of God has been crucified, can you possibly do to make God happy with you?

What sacrifice, now that the Lamb of God has been sacrificed, can you make that'll do more or do better than the death of the Son of God? Or tip the scales in your favor?

What life of goodness can you lay as trump on the ace Jesus has played in His own perfect life and death in your place?

None. Once this death has been died, you can't go there. This death isn't one key among many that opens heaven. It's the only key. And when your faith turns from it to something else? And be sure of it, fellow-redeemed, when you start bargaining with God and adding good to what Jesus has already done, that's exactly what's happening. Christian faith is gone.

And that's not only the loss of faith, but an affront to the God who gave His own Son to be crucified, the once for all offering for the sin of the world. Like someone giving you his own brand-new Lexus and you leaving it out in the yard to rust while you continued to drive your 93 Malibu. Sheer insult. Holding up another righteousness before God than that of Jesus. Another satisfaction than the one Jesus made for you.

For the love of God, don't do that. Don't go there. Instead let the power of this image sear your heart and mind and faith: Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. Because here you can see God isn't trifling. This is God's own Son. That's how seriously He takes your redemption.

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One of the things about a great photograph isn't just that it shows how things have gone up to the point at which the photo was taken—but even that it tells you how things *will* go from that point on. The image of the three-point shot that turns the game with 10 minutes to go and puts the eventual winner on a hot streak tells as much as the game-winning buzzer-beater.

Well, here you have an image in the crucified Son of God that does the same thing. It tells you not only what has happened up to that point, but even what will happen afterward. It tells you that salvation has already been won. It tells you that in this crucified Son of God you can and may and should anchor all your hope. In Him, and in Him alone. It tells you that the judgement has already been carried out. And that when you stand before the throne of God when you pass from this life to the next, there's no need to point anything else except for this image that tells the whole story of your salvation: the Son of God. Crucified for you. Amen.

*pax dei, etc.*

*sdg*

*jsb*