

Sermon for Good Friday

Sermon Text: Matthew 27:33-54 (specifically verses 35-44)



And when they had crucified Him, they divided His garments among them by casting lots. ³⁶Then they sat down and kept watch over Him there. ³⁷And over His head they put the charge against Him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." ³⁸Then two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left. ³⁹And those who passed by derided Him, wagging their heads ⁴⁰and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross." ⁴¹So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked Him, saying, ⁴²"He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in Him. ⁴³He trusts in God; let God deliver Him now, if He desires Him. For He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" ⁴⁴And the robbers who were crucified with Him also reviled Him in the same way.

People came to Jerusalem from all over the world. They wanted to celebrate the Passover. It was to be a celebration of freedom from captivity, a festival of joy because the liberation from the land of Egypt was commemorated at this time... and instead, people found a man in Jerusalem walking to Golgotha under the burden of a heavy cross. A pitiful spectacle. Even the leaders of the people wanted to prevent all this from happening at the time of the Passover. But it had to be this way. God wanted it that way. And because God wanted it this way, this Man is not just one among many, but the Special One, the Son of God – God Himself. On this day, the foundations of the earth were shaken. On this day, the curtain from the Holy of Holies was torn in two. This happened because on that day, life and death, heaven and hell, God and the devil met on a mountain. In Jesus, these contrasts are brought before our eyes. This is not an event that we can watch indifferently on the television like any other catastrophe. Nor is it an event that we can once again pass over as an old Biblical story. No, this story is also profoundly our story because in Jesus, the fate of *my* life is also decided. In Jesus, heaven and hell, the devil and God also meet in *my* life. Who was this Jesus? Rather, who *is* this Jesus?

Something strange happened under the cross. While the foundations of the world were shaken and the Temple curtain was torn in two, the soldiers cast lots for Jesus' robe. This is a strange story because it shows that it is possible to be very close to Jesus and yet be very far away. The soldiers were certainly the closest to the crucifixion. They stood directly beneath the cross. And yet they didn't see everything that Jesus was and is. On the contrary, they were preoccupied with trivialities, with His robe, instead of looking at Jesus Himself. And I asked myself whether these soldiers are not in some respects a reference to us as Christians. We have come very close to Jesus. We are even standing right under the cross. And yet we get worked up about things that really don't belong to Him. We stand directly under the cross and yet we don't concern ourselves with Jesus. We push Him out of the center of the church with loud arguments so that sparks fly. But who is Jesus? And who is Jesus for me? Under the cross, we see Him as wounded, sick, offended, even forsaken by God. This wounded Jesus affects me personally. I cannot stand off to the side without taking part because my case and my life are being negotiated here. I am the sick, the offended, the accused, the one abandoned by God. We can say that He took our sickness upon Himself and carried away our sins. On the day of death and the most severe torment, there is no greater consolation than this: the Almighty has come to my side. He took on my death and my illness.

Jesus – who was He? Today we confess it freely. He was and is God. He is equal to God. He is God for us. When we grasp this in our hearts and confess it with our mouths, the words of Jesus Himself come to us like a slap in the face: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Some said He called to Elijah, but Elijah didn't come to help Him. God Himself remained silent! There on the cross, God Himself remained forsaken by God and without consolation. God Himself died there on the cross. When I think about this, I get a small idea of the magnitude of what happened on Good Friday. The Eternal One dies! Can that even happen? Night meets darkness. Hell meets heaven. None of this can happen without a huge heavenly tsunami. The fact that it became dark in broad daylight and the curtain from the Holy of Holies in the Temple was torn in two was only a small hint of a much greater event that remained hidden from our eyes. On that day, the dead came out of the tombs. This was truly only a small hint of this great heavenly tsunami and also of an even greater tsunami that still lies ahead of us. Amen.