

**SERMON 041814 + GOOD FRIDAY + IMMANUEL LUTHERAN**  
**CHURCHES + ST. JOHN 19:31-35 + IN NOMINE IESU CHRISTI!**

**SINCE IT WAS THE DAY OF PREPARATION, AND SO THAT THE BODIES WOULD NOT REMAIN ON THE CROSS ON THE SABBATH (FOR THAT SABBATH WAS A HIGH DAY), THE JEWS ASKED PILATE THAT THEIR LEGS MIGHT BE BROKEN AND THAT THEY MIGHT BE TAKEN AWAY. SO THE SOLDIERS CAME AND BROKE THE LEGS OF THE FIRST, AND OF THE OTHER WHO HAD BEEN CRUCIFIED WITH HIM. BUT WHEN THEY CAME TO JESUS AND SAW THAT HE WAS ALREADY DEAD, THEY DID NOT BREAK HIS LEGS. BUT ONE OF THE SOLDIERS PIERCED HIS SIDE WITH A SPEAR; AND THERE CAME OUT BLOOD AND WATER. HE WHO SAW IT HAS BORN WITNESS--HIS TESTIMONY IS TRUE, AND HE KNOWS THAT HE IS TELLING THE TRUTH--THAT YOU ALSO MIGHT BELIEVE.**

Christians in every age of the Church's history have looked with sorrowful, yet grateful awe at the central cross of Golgotha. Whatever the state of the Church, whether strong and growing or weak and declining, Good Friday has always been God's Friday. It is the day when by His death Christ, the Son of God, trampled down death and Satan and the powers of hell. Few days equal this day in giving expression to the infinite dimensions of God's love for His fallen creation.

The great Church Fathers rightly saw the events of Good Friday as cosmic, a day that reshaped creation. Darkness covered the land. The earth quaked. The eternal Son of God died. Graves of the saints were opened, and the saints arose and left their place of rest to appear in Jerusalem. The veil of the temple was torn in two. The Roman Centurion was converted, and thus the Gentile Church was born. It was the reverse of that day when Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit and mankind and all creation were changed and subject to death and decay. Through the death of Jesus, King and Lord of heaven and earth, life and light have been restored. After Good Friday the world and all who dwell in it would never be the same!

Let us then look for a detail in John's account of the crucifixion that can be especially comforting as we enter again into the mysteries of God's Friday. As our text begins the trials were over and the death sentence had been pronounced. Now, the Centurion and the soldiers under his command had important roles to play. They were undoubtedly aware that during the days of Passover Jews in the crowded city of Jerusalem would be in a dangerously rebellious mood. After all, for the Jews Passover was the festival commemorating their deliverance from Egyptian bondage, and every year hope revived that the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would once again raise His mighty, right arm to crush the foe that held His chosen people in bondage. It was no secret that Pontius Pilate himself had found their prisoner innocent. The governor was upset that Jewish leaders had badgered him into pronouncing Jesus of Nazareth guilty of a crime He had obviously not committed. Yes, even his wife had been troubled in a dream and had urged Plate to have nothing to do with this mysterious Man, Jesus of Nazareth.

Ironically, it was the duty of these soldiers to see that the prisoner was brought safely and alive to the place of execution. Physically speaking, this would not be an easy task considering the trials and mocking and flogging Jesus had endured a few hours earlier. Then there were the crowds who gathered in the narrow streets of the city to watch the grisly procession. The soldiers had to be on their guard for who could tell what His followers might do in a desperate attempt to free their leader. Who could tell how the mob would respond as they read Pilate's placard, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews?" Moreover, the men had to see to the crucifixion itself. The bodies of the three men had to be impaled and bound to the cross in such a way that they would stay in place until death came, and death was sometimes slow in coming. Finally, the Centurion was the official witness to the death of the prisoners. Failure to execute the prisoners would bring serious consequences! At length three men were raised from the earth to die the most ignominious of deaths--crucifixion.

Soon the hour for the beginning of the Sabbath would be drawing near, and the Jewish leaders, always fastidious about keeping Sabbath laws, would certainly be determined that the bodies not remain on their crosses during the high solemnity of the Passover Sabbath. They petitioned Pontius Pilate to have the legs of the prisoners broken so that they could no longer raise their bodies and death might be hastened by asphyxiation. One team approached the prisoner on the right and another team the prisoner on the left. Their legs were broken. When they came to the central figure they discovered that He had already died. But to make assurance doubly sure one of the soldiers took his spear and pierced the side of Jesus close to His heart. From the wound there poured forth both blood and water. The Evangelist emphatically draws attention to the wound and the flow of water and blood.

More than the other Evangelists, John is at great pains to teach that Jesus of Nazareth is truly the Word of God who with the Father is from all eternity true God. He, together with the Father, brought all things into being and without Him was nothing made that was made. At the same time He is truly a man, whose virgin mother and sisters and brothers were known, who had mastered a trade, who manifested all of the characteristics and vicissitudes of human life, but without sin. It was this person in whom the human and divine natures were joined in a perfect union who suffered and died. Without this death there can be no redemption! But thanks be to God, in the moment of His death God's grace and glory were revealed!

The ancient Fathers of the Church recognized this in the fact that from the riven side of the Savior there flowed blood and water. For the Romans and Jewish leaders this was surely a sign of His death! Ah, but what was for the Romans a guarantee of death is for us a witness to the life which comes to us through water and blood. The Church Fathers regularly interpreted this flow of water and blood as a sacramental flow.

The water which flowed from the side of our Divine Redeemer is an icon of the water of Holy Baptism. In a mystical sense it is the water flowing from the side of our Lord that

fills the baptismal fonts of Churches throughout the world. Thus, the water of Holy Baptism is truly blessed. Through it we have been born again as children of the heavenly Father. Through it we have life abundant and eternal. Through it our sins are daily washed away. Blessed be the God of all mercy! Christ has not only trampled down death, but in death he has poured forth for us the sacramental water of life

From His wounded side there flowed also Blood. The Blood was certainly a testimony to His death. Yet, for us the flowing Blood is a testimony to the life that we receive through His great sacrifice. The Sacred Scriptures declare that life is in the blood. The Lord shed His blood that we might have life. But in a mystical sense the same Blood is given to us in the Blessed Sacrament. Indeed, the Blood that flowed from the side of our Divine Redeemer is the same Blood that is present in the consecrated chalice from which we drink. As St. Paul reminds us the celebration of the Blessed Sacrament is a showing forth of Christ's redeeming death, but at the same time it is a continuing testimony to the power of His Blood to give us life which knows neither sorrow nor end.

Good Friday is in many ways the saddest and most heart-rending day of all. It is the day on which the Son of God and of the Blessed Virgin Mary died. Yet, at the same time it is for us the happiest and most moving days of all. Through His death Christ has trampled down death once and for all. Through the blood and water that flowed from His side He has given us a new birth and eternal life. With this faith we are prepared to celebrate more clearly the triumph of His resurrection which is also the guarantee of our resurrection. Amen.