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Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY
4/14/2017, Good Friday

SERMON 041417 + GOOD FRIDAY + IMMANUEL CHURCH,
MANHATTAN + ST. JOHN 18:36-40 + IN NOMINE JESU!

JESUS ANSWERED, "MY KINGDOM IS NOT OF THIS WORLD. IF MY KINGDOM WERE OF THIS WORLD, MY SERVANTS WOULD HAVE BEEN FIGHTING THAT I MIGHT NOT BE DELIVERED TO THE JEWS. BUT MY KINGDOM IS NOT FROM THE WORLD. " THEN PILATE SAID TO HIM, "SO YOU ARE A KING?" JESUS ANSWERED, "YOU SAY THAT I AM A KING, FOR THIS PURPOSE I WAS BORN AND FOR THIS PURPOSE I HAVE COME INTO THE WORLD--TO BEAR WITNESS TO THE TRUTH. EVERYONE WHO IS OF THE TRUTH LISTENS TO MY VOICE." PILATE SAID TO HIM, "WHAT IS TRUTH?"

Today, Good Friday, is a day of divine revelation! In it is revealed the fulfillment of God's decree, "the soul that sins shall die." In the mysterious three hours of Christ's crucifixion He endured an eternity of hell and death. Indeed, in the those hours of darkness Christ suffered the punishment for the sins of all mankind, from the time of Adam unto the end of this present age. Golgotha reveals God's condemnation of those who sin; however, their deserved punishment was laid on the shoulders of His Only-begotten Son. Since He suffered death and hell in our stead we are forgiven and made heirs of God's love..

Good Friday is indeed a day of suffering, and it cries out, "Behold the Man on the cross!" Look carefully and believe with all your heart that His suffering and death are rightfully yours. Christian artists come to our aid in catching this vision. They have depicted suffering beyond the telling. The Lord Jesus is suspended between heaven and earth, His head, bloody and crowned with thorns, is bowed down in approaching death. Blood drips from His wounded back, hands and feet.. His limbs and entire body seem to quiver in excruciating, unearthly pain. His life is slipping away. But this visual image of agony is but a symbol of hell, the complete separation from God and life and all that is good. We contemplate the Man on the cross so that we can appreciate all that He has done for us and for our salvation. Unless we envision God's wrath over sin and disobedience manifested in Christ's crucifixion, we can scarcely appreciate the cost paid for our redemption from death and hell.

As our text reminds us the Man on the cross is not a helpless victim, He is a King! In the brief dialogue that the Lord Jesus had with Pontius Pilate He declared Himself to be a King, whose kingdom is not of this world. He came into the world to establish a kingdom that would be in but not of the world. His kingdom is the universally accepted reign and rule of God in the hearts and lives of mankind. More specifically, He is the King who has come to bear witness to the "truth." This "truth" **makes God known in and through Christ's person and word.** Those who hear and believe His Word become closely acquainted with God and have a personal relationship with Him.

Now, from the time of His incarnation until Good Friday Christ labored to make God

known to all who followed Him. Mankind in general believes that a god exists, but without Christ he remains a hidden god, one who threatens, one who is indifferent to the needs of mankind, one who has to be appeased through various sacrifices. This understanding of god is far from the “truth” of Christ. Through His life and ministry Christ Jesus the Son of God revealed God as the loving Father, merciful and gentle, waiting patiently for His creation to turn around and come to His waiting arms and be embraced. Christ’s “truth” declares that sin is the great obstacle standing in the way of this glorious reunion. But the obstacle was removed through the “truth” that God’s royal Son offered the sacrifice required for that reunion.

Christ revealed Himself as a King in the heroic sense of one who was responsible for the welfare of His people, as one who was the Champion Warrior who battled for victory over all enemies of His people, as one who cared deeply for every individual in His kingdom, as one who would lay down His life for His people. In a grand climax, on the tree of the cross Christ the King fought and won the battle with sin, Satan and hell to establish His kingdom.

As is so often observed in sermons, Good Friday is indeed a day of infinite suffering, and Christians dare never forget the cost of our redemption. However, this evening I invite you to see beyond the suffering to the revelation of God that lies behind all that Christ did and said in the mysterious three hours of redemptive suffering and death. In those three hours our divine Redeemer and King concentrated on those He had come to make members of His kingdom. The three hours reveal above all God’s divine, selfless love for His creation. From the cross He gives us assurance of the blessings believers receive as the result of His victorious battle.

First, there is the assurance of forgiveness for all believers. In the heart of our embattled King forgiveness extended to those who sinned out of ignorance and did not grasp the seriousness of their action. Moreover, for Him, even a life of crime did not place a person outside the circle of Divine love. For one group Christ prayed for forgiveness; for the penitent malefactor Christ the King promised the splendor, life and light of paradise with Him. These acts of Christ the King can also comfort us! All too often we find ourselves in a defensive mood, and we too do not recognize the seriousness of our offenses. At least at times our evil actions seem to cluster together and we fear that paradise is far, far away. When this happens, behold the Man, your King, on the cross, come to Him with repentant faith and find in Him the forgiveness you desire.

Second, there is the assurance that redemption is an intensely individual matter. The redeemed are not a faceless mass of humanity. See the action of the Man on the cross! In the midst of His suffering Christ looked down and saw His Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and John, His beloved disciple. They were not missed in the crowd gathered about Golgotha, but were singled out as two people who needed an expression of His kingly care. If you will allow your faith to take you to Golgotha this Good Friday evening, you will discover that the Man on the cross is looking down at you as though you were the only person standing there. Seeing you He acts to take care of you and your needs. You

are never lost in the crowd of believers. You are always precious and unique in His sight.

At the height of His suffering Christ, who from eternity had been one with the Father and the Holy Spirit, found Himself forsaken. In agony He cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit suffered death! At the moment of His sacrifice He was forsaken and alone. The comfort of the presence of the two Persons of the Blessed Trinity that never left Him during His ministry, the comfort of the angels who came to Him after Satan's temptation following His baptism were both absent. Now He was alone, and even for our King that unfamiliar abandonment was heart rending. Yet, he endured it for our sake! There are times in life when we feel abandoned and totally alone with none to help. Such moments are moments of unspeakable fear and dread. Ah, but the Man on the cross looks down on your distress to assure you, "You are not alone!" I was abandoned for your sake that you may never really be forsaken by God.

At length the King breathed His last breath and gave up the ghost. He died, but His death is His final gift to us. His death is the death of death! According to His own declaration, He is the resurrection and the life; those who believe in Him will never die for death has been swallowed up in His victory. You who would live behold the Man on the cross, your victorious, life-giving King.

Good Friday is indeed a day of suffering. But if by faith you look carefully at the Man on the cross you will discover He is your King who fought victoriously for you and won for you the fullness of God's grace and life itself. Amen!.