

Sermon for: Trinity Lutheran Church, Manilla

Good Friday Service, March 29, 2024

Sermon Title/Theme: "Guided to SACRIFICE" (Guided to the Cross Series)

Text: John 19:31-35

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

God's people of the Old Testament were divinely "guided to sacrifice." Abel's sacrifice was more highly regarded than Cain's. Rescued from the flood, Noah and his family offered a sacrifice of thanksgiving. Abraham's faith is tested as he is asked to sacrifice his son, Isaac. The preparations for the Exodus from Egypt included the sacrifice of the Passover lamb. The ceremonial laws included regular sacrificial acts—sacrificing animals and grains. The Day of Atonement (Yon Kippur) included the sacrificial event of the year when the high priest went into the holy of holies to sprinkle the sacrificial blood on the altar. Solomon's temple was dedicated with the sacrifice of 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep. Prophet Elijah's sacrifice to the true God wins in a dual with the false prophets of Baal.

Sacrifices transition us to the New Testament. In the early chapters of the Gospel of Luke, Zechariah, the priest, was making a sacrifice in the temple when the angel appeared announcing that Elizabeth and he would be parents of John, the forerunner of the Messiah. Joseph and Mary take the young Child Jesus to the temple as they make the required sacrifices of presentation and purification. All those references to sacrifice were to guide God's people to the sacrifice of Jesus. The sacrifice of Jesus was the culmination of thousands of years of promises from God and centuries of waiting by God's people for this moment to arrive. As they

were guided to the perfect sacrifice of Jesus, we are guided to the cross to receive the blessings of His sacrifice and to become sacrificial in our faith response.

On Good Friday Jesus was sacrificed on a cross. Jesus submits Himself to be willingly sacrificed on a cross. Jesus gives himself fully, freely, and completely. He did not say “no” to any aspect of His mission to remove the power of sin, death, and the devil from us. Because of the reality and depth of Christ’s sacrifice, it is hard for us to look at the cross today. It was hard for those who were there, also. The women stood at a distance. Many who had heard of Jesus or knew him certainly must have turned away as they saw him lifted up on the cross on the outskirts of town at The Place of the Skull.

Jesus was physically sacrificed. His body is placed on the crude wooden “altar.” This type of death was meant to be humiliating—only the worst of criminals or the most aggressive in opposition to Roman authority were crucified. This type of death was not private; each pain, each agony, each embarrassment was seen by all. People could see firsthand that Jesus was in the throes of dying. There was no doubt that Christ’s physical sacrifice was real. At the end of the day, the soldiers recognized that He was already dead when they took Him down from the cross.

The sacrifice of Jesus had more than a physical component. What the people at the cross that day may not have readily or clearly seen was the internal spiritual sacrifice Jesus was enduring. The heavy burden of every sin of every person, past, present, and future was placed upon His sinless divine nature. He felt every pain and struggle of sin that we have experienced and took

that all away with His final breath. With His death, the power of the dying to sin happening inside of us each day is removed and replaced by the power of new life through Him.

Christ's sacrifice made all the ceremonial sacrifices of the Old Testament unnecessary. Because of the sacrifice on the cross, all our sacrifices are also no longer necessary. Anything that we might sacrifice to earn forgiveness is always insufficient. We might try to gain the approval of others or even try to calm our conscience with our "sacrifices" of our time or abilities. While they may be helpful to others or benefit society, they bring no merit with God. Jesus is the all-sufficient sacrifice. Jesus is the Lamb of God who was slain for the sins of the world.

So what does Jesus' sacrifice mean for us? In a word, everything! The wrath of God over our sins is no longer a threat. Jesus takes on the eternal consequences of our sins by dying as a sinless person in our place. We are forgiven and free and able to live a new life in Him. Because Jesus sacrificed Himself for us, the devil has no more power over us because Jesus has defeated him. Jesus has crushed Satan with his sacrifice on the cross this day so that we do not have to fear that the devils temptations have power over us anymore. Satan has been defeated.

Christ's sacrifice on the cross for us also enables us to be what St. Paul calls living sacrifices: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present you bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship," (Romans 12:1). Paul gives additional guidance as to what this "living sacrificially" looks like: "I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned," (Romans 12:3).

Living a sacrificial life for Christ means putting others before yourself, leaning on your faith in

God above your own desiring and freely giving of your time, talent, and possessions for the sake of others and for the sake of Christ.

The Passion of Jesus includes examples of those “guided to sacrifice”: Simon of Cyrene is guided to carry Jesus’ cross; John is guided to go from the cross to care for Mary, the mother of Jesus; Joseph of Arimathea is guided to offer his tomb as a place for Jesus to be buried; Mary Magdalene and the grieving women are guided to follow the burial procession and await an opportunity to complete the burial process.

We are guided to the cross to see the death of Jesus and also follow in faith seeking opportunities to offer our “living sacrifices.” Last Saturday, I stood with some of you at the graveside rites for Mark Schroeder. Mark’s obituary noted, “When his Dad had a stroke, he cared for him those two years before his death; he cared for his mother until she entered the Manor in Manilla; the past years he was caring for his brother, Lynn, who was homebound.” Maybe in his very quiet and private way, Mark was making living sacrifices. Some of you are making or have made similar sacrifices in caring for a loved one or a neighbor in need. Some of you make living and important sacrifices in volunteering for this church or in the community.

Imprisoned and facing persecution for his faith, Paul wrote to the early church, “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain,” (Philippians 1:21). We know that because of Christ’s crucifixion our eternity is certain and our lives can be dedicated to him in response to the giving of Himself.

As we will hear again on Easter morning, Christ’s death and burial was not the end of the story. We know that death is not the end of the story for those who are in Christ. Death is now just the doorway to heaven with Him because of the events of Good Friday, As living sacrifices we

no longer need to fear death because death was destroyed by the cross of Christ. We no longer look to things of this earth to satisfy our human needs. We look to things above where Christ is now seated.

We have been guided to the cross through Lent and Holy Week. Because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross we are guided to FORGIVENESS because He has made payment for all our sins; we are guided to HOPE which is built on Jesus' blood and righteousness; we are guided to LOVE as we see God's love for the world because He gave His only Son; we are guided to PEACE before there we have peace with God; we are guided to TRUST in the truth of our redemption; we are guided to PERSEVERE even as Jesus persevered through every struggle, even death on a cross; we are guided to HUMILITY in the name of the one who humbled Himself even to death on a cross; we are guided to SERVICE even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve; and we are guided to SACRIFICE because Jesus gave Himself as the sacrifice.

Jesus' sacrificed body went from the cross to the darkness of the tomb. Because Jesus is also the living sacrifice, we await expectantly for the promise of NEW LIFE. That is what is "good" on a Good Friday, in Jesus' name. Amen.