

THE SUFFERING OF THE CHRIST

John 19:1-42

Fifth Wednesday in Lent (Series B)

March 13, 2024

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The Gospel lesson comes from *The Gospel According to John*, chapter 19, verses 1 through 42. From John 19, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

¹ Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him. ² And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. ³ They came up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and struck him with their hands. ⁴ Pilate went out again and said to them, "See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him." ⁵ So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold the man!" ⁶ When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him." ⁷ The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God."

⁸ When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid. ⁹ He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰ So Pilate said to him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" ¹¹ Jesus answered him, "**You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.**"

¹² From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar." ¹³ So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic Gabbatha. ¹⁴ Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" ¹⁵ They cried out, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." ¹⁶ So he delivered him over to them to be crucified.

So they took Jesus, ¹⁷ and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. ¹⁸ There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. ¹⁹ Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." ²⁰ Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. ²¹ So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" ²² Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."

²³ When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, ²⁴ so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the Scripture which says,

THE SUFFERING OF THE CHRIST (John 19:1-42)

“They divided my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots.”

So the soldiers did these things, ²⁵ but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “**Woman, behold, your son!**” ²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, “**Behold, your mother!**” And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

²⁸ After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), “**I thirst.**” ²⁹ A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. ³⁰ When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “**It is finished,**” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

³¹ 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. ³² So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. ³³ But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴ But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. ³⁵ He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe. ³⁶ For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broken.” ³⁷ And again another Scripture says, “They will look on him whom they have pierced.”

³⁸ After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body. ³⁹ Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. ⁴⁰ So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. ⁴¹ Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. ⁴² So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.
Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

God died. At a specific moment in history, at the orders of a Roman governor, the Son of God died for the salvation of the world. When we talk about the forgiveness of sins, salvation, and eternal life, that is all tied to a specific moment in human history. Forgiveness, life, and salvation don’t just come out of nowhere. They come from one specific moment in human history. The eternal Son of God, through whom the entire world was created, died. He bore our sins in his body. He subjected himself to suffering and murder. At a moment in time, just like this moment, or any other moment, he cried, “**It is finished!**” His lungs stopped breathing air. His heart stopped pumping blood. His brain stopped sending impulses. Just like any other human being dies, he was alive one moment, and then he was not. God died. We should often meditate on the historical reality of this.

THE SUFFERING OF THE CHRIST (John 19:1-42)

We confess this every Sunday in the creed. If you use the creed as part of your daily devotions, you may confess it every day. We've been studying the creed on Wednesday evenings. Part of the benefit of this is so that, when confess the creed, we might be able to meditate on the specifics of creed. It's helpful to zero in on one phrase of the creed at a time, so that when we confess that phrase, we can think of everything it summarizes. Every phrase of the creed is a brief summary of something much larger. It should not be the sort of thing where we memorize it so we can say it without thinking about it. Instead, we memorize it so that we can think deeply about it when we confess it. So we memorize it and meditate on it, so that each phrase can come to life in our minds. So I'm going to zero in on each of the phrases regarding Jesus's suffering.

When we confess, "Suffered under Pontius Pilate," think of everything we just read about Pilate. And think about Jesus being flogged. Think of him being mocked by the soldiers and the mob of Jesus' fellow Jews. Think of the purple robe and the crown of thorns. The word "suffered" also includes an element of patience. So think about the way he made no defense, but he patiently endured slander as people made false accusations against him. Jesus "suffered under Pontius Pilate."

Have you ever noticed that there are three human beings mentioned by name in the Apostles' Creed? Jesus, of course, has to be mentioned. Most of it is about him. He is the Son of God and became a human being. Then his mother Mary is named. She is significant enough to be named, because she is the vessel that carried the Son of God when he became man. We talked about that last week. And then the third one is Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor who presided over Jesus' execution. This is kind of surprising. There are certainly more prolific characters in the Bible. Adam and Eve are not mentioned in the creed. Neither is Abraham, Moses, or David. None of Jesus apostles' are mentioned. Caiaphas, the high priest, isn't mentioned, even though he's the one who really pushed for Jesus' execution. But Pilate, the reluctant politician, is named.

Pilate didn't want to have anything to do with Jesus' crucifixion. He tried to stop it, but not very hard. John's gospel has the most information about Pilate's involvement. We read some of it, but there's a lot more in the last part of chapter 18. And I wonder how John got that information. He knew what was said in Pilate's headquarters. Maybe John was there. I think that's the least likely possibility. That seems like a difficult meeting to get in on. Maybe Jesus told him about later, after he rose from the dead. So maybe the record of that conversation is, to Pilate, proof of Jesus' resurrection, that he was able to relate this conversation that no one else heard. Or maybe someone in Pilate's headquarters came to believe in Jesus, perhaps even Pilate himself. We don't know exactly how, but somehow, John knew what was said in there.

The point of this, and the point of the creed naming Pilate, is that it ties Jesus' death and resurrection to real, historical persons. These things didn't happen in a corner (*Acts 26:26*). The gospels name several historical persons who could have validated the testimony. We read about Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus (*19:38-42*). They were prominent figures among the Jews. The creed mentions Pilate, because he was a high ranking member of the Roman government. Of all people, he had intimate knowledge of Jesus' crucifixion. He presided over it, and not in a detached, impersonal way like he might have had with the criminals crucified with Jesus. But Jesus is a case he would have remembered for the rest of his life. And it wasn't just the crucifixion, but Pilate also would have to deal with the claims of Jesus' resurrection. Our faith does not rest upon things that supposedly happened in some backwater village with just a handful of witnesses. It's not based on a legend where we don't even know when or where something was supposed to happen. It's not one man saying he received a vision about

THE SUFFERING OF THE CHRIST (John 19:1-42)

something. Our faith rests upon real historical events that happened publicly. Even the Roman governor was involved. There's a level of historicity with Christianity that no other religion even comes close to. And that's a little bit of what we should remember when we confess, "Suffered under Pontius Pilate."

When we confess, "Was crucified," think of every moment Jesus spent skin to wood with that cross. Think of him carrying his cross. Think of him being nailed to the cross. Think of the cross being lifted up. Think of the sign above his head. Think of the mockers around him. Think of the darkness over the land. Think of the soldiers bargaining over Jesus' clothes while his mother stands by. So think of his mother and his friends watching this horrid sight. Think of the pain and agony. Think of the thirst and the sour wine.

When we confess that one word, "Dead," think of his death. Hear the words, "It is finished!" in your mind. Feel the final breath on your skin, as if your hand was right in front of his mouth. See his head drop and his hanging body go limp. Watch the blood as it drips from his limbs and splashes in a little pool on the ground. Or watch it flow down the wood of the cross, staining and drying as it flows. Watch the soldiers come with a spear and thrust it into his side. And when they pull out the spear, a flow of blood and water follow it.

When we confess, "And buried," think of Joseph of Arimathea going to Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus. He was a secret disciple, who was now willing to out himself, at least to Pilate. Think of Nicodemus joining him to help bury the body. This is another significant historical detail. These men were well known to the Jews. Here they are handling the dead corpse of Jesus. Think of them carrying the cold and limp body of Jesus. Think of them wrapping it in cloths with myrrh and aloes. Think of them laying his body in a tomb. Think of all this so that, in your mind and heart, you can know that this Jesus really died. Your God died for you.

In his Small Catechism, Martin Luther explains what this means for us. He doesn't make it up or theorize about it. But he borrows language from various Scripture passages, like the one we read tonight from 1 Peter (1:13-21). Jesus redeemed us. The word "redeem" means to purchase or buy something. Jesus bought us and freed us.

We, as "lost and condemned creatures," were in slavery to sin, death, and the power of the devil. Jesus bought us out of this. The picture is one of a benevolent savior going to a slave market to buy all the slaves and set them free. It's like that, but also different in some ways. First, Jesus did not buy us from the devil. He didn't offer his life as a sacrifice to the devil. He offered his life as a sacrifice to God. So it's not as if the devil gets his payment and walks away happy with the profit he made off us. The devil is the loser in the atonement. He doesn't get anything, and he loses everything. Jesus satisfied the demands of the Law. He atoned for sin, so death loses all its power, and Jesus triumphs over death and the devil. This is much different than paying off the devil.

The other way it's different is that we don't become independent. Jesus freed us from sin, death, and the power of the devil, but we do not become autonomous. We belong to Jesus. He bought us. In the catechism, Luther says Jesus did this "in order that I might be his own." And in some places, the Bible speaks of us as slaves of Christ. This is true in the sense that we belong to him. But it's not the way we normally think of slavery, especially in the American context. Jesus does not own us because he wants to extract service from us and make a profit off us. He does not abuse us. It's completely gracious. He is our Lord, because we need him to be our Lord. It's a benevolent thing. So, much more often, the Bible speaks of us as children of God and heirs

THE SUFFERING OF THE CHRIST (John 19:1-42)

with Christ (e.g., Gal. 3:26-29). This is why Jesus purchased you “with his holy and precious blood.”

So when you confess the creed, especially the part about how Jesus “suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried,” think about these two things. First, remember the reality of it. In time and space, at a specific moment in history, your God died. Meditate on his suffering and death. Second, remember why he died. He died to purchase you from sin, death, and the power of the devil. He broke the bond that these enemies had over you. So you are free. You are forgiven. You belong to the gracious Savior who purchased you “with his holy and precious blood,” and he will continue to love you for all eternity. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.