

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

Some think that there is nothing “good” about today. So, they say, it should be called “Sad Friday” or “Dark Friday.” To be sure, this is not everyone's favorite day. Deep down, we find this day to be sad and painful. We would rather skip Lent and jump to Easter. There is a part of us that would rather focus on the healing and feeding and the glory of Jesus instead of the cross. Why? Deep down, we want to avoid suffering and focus on glory. But also deep down, Good Friday is a day of contrition and deep reflection. It should be, because our sin caused Jesus to die.

The law of God – the Ten Commandments, loving God with all our heart, loving our neighbor as ourselves – has torn us. He has struck us down, the Law demands our death. We deserve death, we are the one's who have separated ourselves from God. We are rebels.

Yet, the Son of God, perfect and blameless is being led to Golgotha with His cross. The Creator and King of the entire cosmos is being mocked. And when they had mocked Him, they took the purple robe off Him and put on His clothes and led Him out to be crucified. Up to this point in the trial, Jesus had been wearing a purple robe. It had been given to him in mockery. And the soldiers had taken advantage of the joke, mocking Jesus and beating Him. Now, though, they took it off of Him. They were “dethroning” him. In effect, saying, “You're no king.”

It's easy to shake your head and say, “If they only knew.” If they knew that was God standing there, they would have bowed before Him in humility instead of mockery. If they'd known He was the Messiah come to save them, they would've been saying, “Lord, have mercy!”

We know what they did not! Yet, we still mock God, attempting to dethrone Him and to be King of our own lives. We seek, even unintentionally, to provide a means of salvation for ourselves by touting how much good we do, maybe even showing that we have sacrificed for others.

His death is placed in the balance on one side and all of fallen humanity on the other. Jesus, then, is our substitute. He died our death. Your works, tainted with sin, earn you no salvation. “For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice....”

Steadfast love is shown to us on the cross, His steadfast love to die our death. Rather than our works, we are given the knowledge of God, faith that the Christ suffers for our sin, that a real exchange took place. The Son of God died so that we could be sons and daughters of God. Jesus was torn so that we could be healed. He was punished so that we could be given peace with God our Father. Jesus endured hell on the cross so that we could enjoy heaven. He took upon Himself our sin so that we could be declared holy. Of all the guilt and shame we have for our sin, we come today in contrition. For if there is one day that should relieve every guilty twinge, this is the day. He pays the penalty of our guilt so that we can be set free! Every day, from the moment we rise to the moment we sleep you are forgiven by Christ. This is why he died, to deliver your salvation.

And Jesus did all of this voluntarily. The cross was not forced upon Jesus against His own will. Jesus willingly went to the cross.

And so, Christ's death upon the cross is Good News for us sinners. This is not a day to stay home. The cross is not anything to be ashamed of. Instead, the cross was the means of our salvation. The cross is for us who have been torn, that He may heal us. The cross is for us who have been stuck down by our sin, that He may bind us up.

So, is this day a day of sorrow or a day of joy? It is a day of sorrow, because we are responsible for the death of Christ. It is a day of sorrow, because our sin put Christ on the cross. However, it is a day of joy, because Christ paid for our sins. As the soldiers mocked Jesus and placed the inscription above him that read, "The King of the Jews," he was dying for your salvation. He gives Himself for you and calls you as his own, and buries you in baptism into his death places on your heart the clear inscription "Jesus, crucified for me."

On the outside evening has come. On the outside the spectators of His crucifixion have all gone home. Some have gone home weeping. Some have gone home perplexed. Some have gone home pleased with themselves and their part in getting rid of this "blasphemer" – as they thought. On the outside of the tomb the Sabbath has begun with its demand for rest and attempted obedience to so many rules.

But on the inside of the tomb rests the body of the only human being perfectly obedient to God's holy will and law. Yet on the inside there is only darkness – total darkness. There is no light! There is no sound! There is no life!

But there soon will be! All is not what it seems to be in this house of death. The body that lies in the silent darkness of this tomb will not return to dust. The battle that He waged for us was not lost but won. Even cold, black, lifeless, death will not long keep its hold on Him. And now your death is also not what it seems. It seems so final, so hopeless, so irreversible! But this day means that is not true! If there is one thing the suffering and death and darkness of Good Friday trumpet – it is that God who brought the curse of death for sin has fully poured out His wrath against sin.

When the darkness of death draws close to you (to me) earthly hopes will vanish, human counsel and spiritual fairy tales about what comes next will be of no significance, but the death of Jesus provides sure and solid comfort and confidence. He knows that realm of death. He's been there and done that! He tasted death and burial for us. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil. Why? Because Thou art with me, Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.

Tonight we remember what came before the darkness of His tomb. Gather with us here on Easter morning to remember what came after. The best news this sinful world will ever hear came from inside His tomb by way of His cross.