

Midweek Lent Homily
Isaiah 53:4-7: "The Lamb Led to Slaughter"
March 25, 2020 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

Behold, the Lamb!

In Nomine Iesu

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Isaiah 53:4-7

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. (ESV)

O Lord Jesus Christ, only Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, who suffered for us and bore our sins in Your own body on the tree, we give You hearty thanks for all Your goodness and mercy, and most humbly ask You to grant that with Your stripes we may be healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; but turn us again to You and impart Your grace to us, that, being dead to sins, we may live unto righteousness, and evermore serve You, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 106)

In Christ Jesus, the spotless, the lowly, the innocent, dear fellow redeemed:

Why did Jesus have to suffer? And what was that suffering like? We wouldn't expect to find the answer to these questions in one of the Old Testament books. But that is what we have in Isaiah chapter 53. Isaiah's prophecy was written more than 700 years before the events they describe. He clearly gives the reasons for and the details of Jesus' suffering. He does this by means of a picture.

He speaks about a flock of sheep which gave its shepherd all sorts of fits! Maybe one sheep stayed away when the shepherd called. Another disregarded the pleading of its mother or father. Another put its life in danger through recklessness or wandering. Another cared only about satisfying its sexual urges. Another loved to eat the neighbor's produce. Another was always blaming others for his wrongs. Every lamb in the flock went its own way, thought about its own plans, followed its own selfish instinct.

All except for one. One lamb stayed right by the shepherd's side. He was perfectly attuned to the shepherd's will and word. And the shepherd loved this lamb. The other sheep did not care about the shepherd unless they were in trouble. Then they would bleat and cry out and wonder what was taking him so long. In those times, they wished for a better shepherd, one who would give them everything they wanted exactly when they wanted it.

But that one loyal lamb did not join them when they did those things. They despised him for this. "He thinks he's so special," they thought. "Shepherd's little pet!" "Why doesn't he lighten

up? Have some fun?" And truth be told, they wished that harm would come to him. If only he could be gotten away from the shepherd....

Then one day, they decided to do whatever mischief they could at the neighbor's farm. They destroyed his crops, polluted his well, chewed on some wires and burned down his barn. Everything was ruined by those wicked sheep. What payment could the shepherd give? What could make up for all the good things that were destroyed? What should be done with those sheep?

The shepherd looked to the lamb at his side and said, "You are my most precious possession. I can offer no richer payment than you, and nothing less will suffice. I must give your life for theirs." But that wouldn't be right! Why should the good lamb suffer for the straying sheep? Those sheep are the ones who should pay! Except what would they give? They had no good to give. It had to be the lamb.

The hymnwriter Paul Gerhardt took up this theme in a hymn we have been singing this Lent. The first verse takes us right to the moment that the good lamb is sent for punishment.

A Lamb goes uncomplaining forth,
The guilt of all men bearing;
And laden with the sins of earth,
None else the burden sharing!
Goes patient on, grows weak and faint,
To slaughter led without complaint,
That spotless life to offer;
Bears shame and stripes, and wounds and death,
Anguish and mockery, and saith,
"Willing all this I suffer."

But why would He be willing to suffer for "the sins of earth"? What would cause Him to do this? The hymn continues:

This Lamb is Christ, the soul's great Friend,
The Lamb of God, our Savior;
Him God the Father chose to send
To gain for us His favor.
"Go forth, My Son," the Father saith,
"And free men from the fear of death,
From guilt and condemnation.
The wrath and stripes are hard to bear,
But by Thy Passion men shall share
The fruit of Thy salvation."

"Yea, Father, yea, most willingly
I'll bear what Thou commandest;
My will conforms to Thy decree,
I do what Thou demandest."

O wondrous Love, what hast Thou done!
The Father offers up His Son;
The Son, content, descendeth!
O Love, how strong Thou art to save!
Thou layest Him within the grave
Whose might the boulders rendeth.
(*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* #331, vv. 1-3)

This is what Jesus did for you. He gave Himself over to suffering and death, so you would not be punished for the wayward and wicked things you have done. He offered Himself in your place, as your Substitute. He went to the cross bearing your griefs and carrying your sorrows. He went there to be wounded for your transgressions, to be crushed for your iniquities. He was chastised so you would have peace, flogged so you would be healed.

Every instance of your disobedience toward God, every time that you went your own way instead of His—all those iniquities were placed on the Lamb of God. God the Father laid your sins on His only Son, His beloved Son, with whom He was well pleased (Mat. 3:17, 17:5). And Jesus took it all willingly. He obeyed the will of His Father. He freely let Himself be sent to slaughter bearing the sins of the world. He did not defend Himself. He did not try to run away.

The apostle Peter describes His unthinkable sacrifice: *“He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly”* (1Pe. 2:22-23). What caused Jesus to do all this? What did He expect to accomplish? Peter continues: *“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls”* (vv. 24-25).

Jesus gave Himself for you, so you would be reunited and reconciled with God. He let Himself be slaughtered and roasted in the fires of hell, so you would not be. The LORD is not angry with you for the sins that you and all the rest of us wicked sheep have done. He forgives you and me all our sins, every single one.

So what shall we do? Run back to the sins that have done so much damage to ourselves and others? No. We pray for God’s grace to serve Him more and better until the end of our days:

Lord, all my life I’ll cling to Thee,
Thy love fore’er beholding,
Thee ever, as Thou ever me,
With loving arms enfolding.
Yea, Thou shalt be my precious Light
To guide me safe through death’s dark night,
My heart in sorrow cheering;
Henceforth myself and all I have
To Thee, my Savior, e’er I’ll give,
Into Thy cause all pouring. (v. 5) *Amen.*

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