Midweek Lent – St. Matthew 27:24-26
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Wounded for Our Transgressions: His Back

In Nomine Iesu

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St. Matthew 27:24-26
So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this Man's blood; see to it yourselves." And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered Him to be crucified. (ESV)

Our loving Savior and Redeemer, who not only pled the cause of mankind before the tribunal of supreme Justice and were by Your Father stricken, smitten and afflicted for our sins, but also willingly gave Yourself over into the hands of wicked men, permitting them to take, bind, and abuse You, enlighten our eyes to see the wonders of Your love, patience, and meekness in Your sufferings, that we may acknowledge You the Lamb of God which has taken away our sins, accept Your merits by faith, and willingly follow You in all our trials, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 109)

In Christ Jesus, who saved us from God's wrath by shedding His blood in our place (Rom. 5:9), dear fellow redeemed:

Blood is absolutely essential to our survival. If we lose our blood, we lose our life. But as important as it is to us, we would rather not see it. We want it to stay inside us, not bleed through to the outside. When we do see blood, it always causes some shock. We react differently when we realize our nose is not running, it is bleeding! And we cry out in alarm when we accidently slice our hand while preparing a meal or working on a project.

We do not purposely make ourselves bleed. But it does happen that one person will inflict wounds on another. The Roman governor Pontius Pilate knew that Jesus' lifeblood was about to pour out of Him. Pilate knew that Jesus was going to be killed. Even though he tried to wash his hands of Jesus' blood, it was his order that sent Jesus to the cross. This is why in the Apostles' Creed we still recall the part he played. We say that Jesus "suffered under Pontius Pilate."

The sentence being given, Jesus was now treated as a criminal. The Romans had no love for the Jews, so this seemed an excellent opportunity for the Roman soldiers to make an example of one of them. And who better than the one called "The King of the Jews"? They tied Jesus to a pillar and proceeded to whip His back repeatedly. The soldiers used a whip made of leather strips with pieces of bone or metal attached to the ends. The whip cut into Jesus' back and tore open the flesh. Just one slash would have left life-long scars, and Jesus was whipped over and over again. The pain was excruciating and the blood loss severe.

It makes us shudder to picture it. We can maybe imagine a notorious criminal deserving something like this. But not Jesus. All Jesus had done was help and heal and bless, and now He

was being tortured. What an injustice! And yet this was all according to God's plan. More than 700 years before this, the prophet Isaiah recorded the words of this Suffering Servant: *"I gave my back to those who strike" (50:6).*

Jesus was not being scourged against His will. He willingly gave His back to those who struck Him. But why would He do that? He did that because He wants you to see the picture painted by the whip. He wants you to read the message in those lines. In those cuts and gouges, He wants your eye to see that glistening red blood pool in the wounds, push outward, and run down from His body.

This is holy blood, cleansing blood; it is the blood of the eternal God! And Jesus let it pour out, in order to atone for all your sins. You see, there was something worse than a whip cutting into Jesus' back. What cut even deeper and inflicted worse pain on Jesus was your sins.

He was whipped for all the times you took out your anger on someone and wanted to physically harm them. He was whipped for the times you lashed out and used harsh words to cut deep. He was whipped for your hateful thoughts when you breathed out curses for others instead of prayers and blessings. The punishment you deserved for your sins, He took for you.

This horrible punishment and suffering was God's will for His Son. It was the only way to make payment for our sins. So when we see Jesus suffering, we see at the same time God's wrath for our sins and we see His love for us. God poured out His wrath against sin on His only Son, and He did it so that we would be saved. In Jesus' scourging, we see God's punishment and His grace.

This is made vividly clear in Isaiah 53. It says that our Savior was *"stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted" (v. 4).* Isaiah does not name the Roman soldiers as the strikers, the smiters, and the afflicters. He says that it was God who did this. Jesus knew it had to be this way. Just a few hours earlier He had prayed, *"Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done" (Luk. 22:42).* The cup of suffering could not be removed. It had to happen like this. It was Jesus or us; His back or ours.

Like a parent who might wrap up a child and turn his back toward harm as a shield, Jesus embraced all humanity—the whole sinful world—and exposed His back to the Father's holy wrath. He shielded us from the perfect anger and just punishment of God. Jesus didn't deserve it, but He did it out of love for you.

So in those wounds on His back, you should see your sins. They are all reflected in those cuts and gouges and bruises. All of them were put on Jesus—not one missing, not even the ones you still carry with you as a burden of guilt. And Jesus' precious blood poured out of those countless wounds to wash all your sins away. Because He shed His blood for you, you do not need to fear the wrath of God. You have no sins to suffer for since those sins have already been paid for.

When Pilate declared that he was innocent of Jesus' blood, the mob stirred up by the Jewish leaders replied, *"His blood be on us and on our children!"* They were saying that they would accept responsibility for Jesus' death. They meant to destroy Jesus, but He came to save them. Jesus

turns that phrase around for our blessing. He poured out His blood to cover our sins and the sins of our children. His cleansing blood was applied to us at our Baptism, and it is poured into us when we drink from the cup of His Holy Supper.

Jesus let His blood pour out in suffering, and He still pours it out for our spiritual health. His holy blood is our lifeblood that we cannot do without. Jesus *"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" (Isa. 53:5)*. Thanks be to God. *Amen*.

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