

Wounded for Our Transgressions: His Side

In Nomine Iesu

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St. John 19:31-37

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. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with [Jesus]. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. 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. For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: *“Not one of His bones will be broken.”* And again another Scripture says, *“They will look on Him whom they have pierced.”* (ESV)

Lord, in Thy nail prints let me read
That Thou to save me hast decreed
And grant that in Thine opened side
My troubled soul may ever hide. *Amen.*
(*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary #291, v. 10*)

In Christ Jesus, whose streams of blood and water from His side give evidence both of His death and of our life, dear fellow redeemed:

The Roman soldiers were given orders to remove the three Jewish men from their crosses. Seeing that the criminals on either side of Jesus were still alive, the Roman soldiers brutally smashed their legs. This kept them from being able to push themselves up and allow their lungs to breathe. They died quickly gasping for air. But Jesus was already dead by that time. At three o'clock that Friday afternoon, Jesus had declared His work finished. Then He cried out with a loud voice, *“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!”* (Luk. 23:46). After saying these words, He breathed His last.

The soldiers could see there was no need to break Jesus' legs, since He was already dead. Through all the beating and torture He endured since the previous evening, His bones had stayed whole. This was to fulfill the prophecy of Scripture, *“Not one of His bones will be broken.”* Just as the bones of a Passover lamb had to be kept intact, so the bones of Jesus, the Lamb of God, also remained intact.

To verify Jesus' death, a soldier plunged a spear into His side, and blood and water immediately spilled out. Medical experts explain that the tip of the spear pierced the pleural cavity near the heart where water would have built up, and they suggest that the spear may have entered the heart itself causing the blood to gush out. This stream of blood and water proved that Jesus had died. The Apostle John was there and saw it with his own eyes. He

recorded it in his Gospel, so that we could be sure beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus really did die on the cross.

We also know why He died. He died to atone for the sins of all people stretching back to our first parents, Adam and Eve. The future of the first man was bright when the LORD God caused him to fall into a deep sleep, cut open his side, and removed a rib. He made that rib into a woman and brought her to the man as his perfect complement. God had brought life from the man's side, and He promised to create life from their union as husband and wife.

But then the woman listened to the devil's temptation and led her husband to join her in sin. St. Paul explains the terrible consequence of this sin: *"Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned"* (Rom. 5:12). This is why Jesus went to the cross. He went there to save us from the sin we inherited which required our death. He went there to give Himself in our place.

St. Paul expresses this good news: *"Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men"* (v. 18). When we see the piercing of Jesus' side, we see everything come full circle. Adam was led into sin by the wife who came from his side—life became death. And now the redemption of sinners was verified by what came from Jesus' side—His death became our life.

You can see why the hymnwriter encourages you to hide in the cleft side of Jesus (ELH #286). The water and the blood cleanse you, he says. They are the "double cure" for the guilt and power of your sins. Without Jesus' death, there is no cleansing for your sins. There is no hope of salvation and eternal life. Without His death, you are stuck with Adam, dying because of sin. But because of His death, you now live.

Those streams of blood and water are also a beautiful picture of the way Jesus continues even now to bring you His life. I have a painting at home which shows a chalice catching the blood from Jesus' side and a baptismal font catching the water. The Sacraments of Jesus are where He applies His saving work to you.

Baptism joined you with the death of Jesus on the cross where He paid for each and every one of your sins. There is nothing left undone. Jesus made satisfaction for all your transgressions, and that forgiveness was applied to you in your Baptism. Then when you were able to examine yourself and understand the Lord's rich promises, you were ushered to His table. There He continues to bring you forgiveness and fill you with His life-giving body and blood. The blood and water were signs of Jesus' death, but now they are the signs of the life He gives through His Holy Sacraments.

Though the spear was plunged into Jesus' side with coldness, that spear is meant for your comfort. It proved that Jesus was willing to do what it took to save you. The eternal Son of God was willing to die for you. He was willing to go through the immeasurable pain and suffering that He did, so you would be freed from the curse.

He kept that gash in His side as proof of His victory. On the third day after His death, Jesus appeared again alive to His disciples. He came in their midst, said *"Peace be with you,"* and

immediately *“showed them his hands and his side”* (Joh. 20:19-20). Those marks from His crucifixion, so painful to watch when they were done to Jesus, now became marks of His glory.

Your Savior, who was *“wounded for your transgressions”* and suffered in agony for you on the cross, has risen again. He has triumphed over death itself and secured eternal life for you. *“For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive”* (1Co. 15:21-22). Thanks be to God. Amen.

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