

GOOD FRIDAY MESSAGE, April 10, 2009

When you think about it, the physical body of Christ must have been a remarkably healthy body. Not necessarily a handsome body. As our Old Testament lesson **Isaiah 53** says: **‘He had ... no beauty that we should desire Him’**. In other words, Jesus wouldn’t have been considered a hunk. He was very ordinary. But, it is hard to imagine a person who healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, opened the ears of the deaf, made the lame walk, and, even, raised the dead to life, as being anything but healthy. Just on a totally practical basis, Jesus had regular physical exercise by walking extensively. His diet would have included lean meats, whole grains, fruits and vegetables. He did all the stuff we should do during the time He grants us on earth... exercise..., good nutrition..., in order to be good stewards of our bodies for Christ. Good nutrition and exercise will not extend our lives. **Psalm 39** tells us **‘our days are ordained by God,’** but poor diet and exercise can shorten our lives and rob God of our stewardship of ourselves for Him and for others.

However, Jesus’ good physical health begins to change on the night He was betrayed. Jesus wasn’t a hunk to begin with, but by the time we consider what He must have looked like, crucified upon that old rugged cross in our place, He must have been hideously ugly on that first Good Friday. Even in the Garden of Gethsemene, this hideous transformation of the body of Christ began. The Gospel of **Luke** tells us **‘being in agony He prayed and His sweat became like great drops of blood’**. Medical journals call this, and I hope I pronounce it correctly, *Hematidrosis* (he"mah-tid-ro'sis), which can occur with our body even under highly emotional circumstances. Beginning to be more and more weakened by this emotional turmoil of denial and betrayal by friends and sweating bloody sweat, Jesus is arrested. Where upon the guards blindfold Him, spit on Him and strike Him repeatedly in the face with their fists we are told.

‘He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief and as one whom men hid their faces. He was despised and we esteemed Him not’. Then put on trial before Pilate, Jesus is scourged, flogged and whipped.

Flogging was a legal preliminary for every Roman execution, only women, Roman Senators and soldiers were exempt. The usual instrument for this torture was a short whip with several braided thongs with iron balls or pieces of sharp bone tied on the ends, gruesome. The condemned would be naked, as the back and buttocks and legs were repeatedly flogged to fragments. This brutal attack would leave the body of the accused looking like raw hamburger meat. The word incarnation literally means ‘in the flesh’, ‘in the meat’. How totally true this is when we see our God naked, bruised, flogged to raw flesh. That is truly and totally the incarnation of our God as our Savior.

I'm not trying to gross you out, but simply trying to help you meditate upon as **Colossians 1** tells us whom **'all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell'**= Jesus and what He endured to make you whole and to heal you of your sins before God. It is a huge price God paid for you, you see – a ransom beyond which rational thinking can comprehend but which faith can meditate upon and receive and believe. **'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'**.

In that torture of Jesus, God incarnate, we receive as God's Word says: **Philippians 4 'peace which passes all understanding'**, **Romans 5 'Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ'**.

Jesus then endured more ridicule... a purple robe was placed upon His lacerated back, a crown of thorns was pressed into His head, they spit more upon Him and struck Him repeatedly on the head with a staff (rod).

'He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth, like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth'.

Just for a moment this Good Friday, pause and think, with the lack of food, water and sleep, and enduring such pain and blood loss, what Jesus' physical condition was, even *before* He was crucified in your place, as your substitute.

'Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush Him, He has put Him to grief, His soul makes an offering for guilt', our guilt of sins against God and against others crushed Jesus, so that our guilt would be paid for by Jesus.

Then came the procession out to Golgatha. He was forced to carry the cross bar of His own instrument of death. It would have weighed easily 75-100 pounds. Then the body of Christ is nailed to that cross through His hands or wrists. Then the beam is hoisted up and His feet are nailed down. Gruesome. Awful.

'The Righteous One shall make many to be accounted righteous and He shall bear their iniquities'

We sinners are the ones accounted righteous = forgiven by God for Jesus sake at an astronomical price, God's life.

Crucifixion actually causes asphyxiation. With the weight of the body, the victim cannot breathe, and each breath is agonizingly more painful as they try to lift themselves up by their legs to relieve the pressure upon their lungs. Death comes in the loss of blood, exhaustion and, of all things, suffocation, ironically, while hanging in mid-air. And even after death the body of Christ is abused. A spear is lanced into His side, piercing His lungs and heart from which water and blood flow. And the **'image of the**

invisible God', the feet of Christ, the hands of Christ, the mouth, ears, eyes of Christ, the heart and blood of Christ, the whole Body of Christ, God incarnate, God in the meat, in the flesh, is dead.

'He poured out His soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors, yet He bore the sin of many and makes intercession for the transgressors'. IT IS FINISHED!

II.

We are led this Good Friday to briefly contemplate - briefly meditate, the utter desolation, the complete loneliness of Jesus' disciples and followers, and of the women, in particular, Jesus' mother, as we join them at the foot of that cross of Calvary. It's the same desolation and loneliness many of you have experienced at the death of a loved one, particularly; you parents who grieve the death of a child understand how Mary's soul was pierced by this sword of sorrow.

Why didn't Jesus save Himself? Why should He allow the finality of death to destroy the love and joy He so freely gave to others? Why was He always saying **'The Kingdom of God is at hand'** and then seemed to take that Kingdom away in the grave? And as we pause to consider the truly awfulness of Jesus' crucifixion, why would He tell us **'If any would come after Me let Him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me'**. The price seems so high. And what did Jesus mean when He said of His body, **'Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up'**? What is Good Friday really all about? What is it that makes today 'good' as we meditate and contemplate on the death of our God in the incarnate body of Christ? It all seems so final, so gruesome, so awful, so finished to be a 'good' Friday.

III.

The last time I led you in worship during this 2009 Lenten season, I shared with you, as my attempt to apply God's Word to our lives, a song by George Strait, *I Saw God Today*, as we are the Body of Christ, His Church. As an application of my Good Friday message, I would like to use another country-western song that I like by Randy Travis entitled *Three Wooden Crosses*.

Simply listen to the message of the lyrics. I printed them for you on the bulletin insert as follows:

Three Wooden Crosses – Randy Travis

A farmer and a teacher, a hooker and a preacher, ridin' on a midnight bus bound for Mexico. One's headed for vacation, one for higher education, an' two of them were searchin' for lost souls. The driver never saw the stop sign. An eighteen wheeler can't stop on a dime.

[Chorus] - There are 3 wooden crosses on the right side of the highway, why there's not four of them, heaven only knows I guess it's not what you take when you leave this world behind you, it's what you leave behind you when you go.

That farmer left a harvest, a home and eighty acres, the faith an' love for growin' things in his young son's heart. An' that teacher left her wisdom in the minds of lots of children, did her best to give 'em all a better start. An' that preacher whispered: ' Can't you see that Promised Land?' As he laid his blood stained Bible in that hooker's hand.

Chorus

That's the story that our preacher told last Sunday, as he held that blood stained Bible up, for all of us to see. He said, 'Bless the farmer, and the teacher and the preacher, who gave this Bible to my Momma, who read it to me'

Chorus

There are 3 wooden crosses on the right side of the highway. 'I guess it's not what you take when you leave this world behind you, it's what you leave behind you when you go'.

You see, that's why Jesus didn't save Himself from His crucifixion. That's why Jesus' death on the cross didn't end the love and joy He so freely gave. That's why Jesus taught that, "The Kingdom of God is near." That's why He invites you to take up your cross and follow Him 'through faith' as your Lord and Savior. This is what makes Good Friday good. Jesus has left behind for you, through His death on the cross, as all those passages from Isaiah I read have said, **'the complete forgiveness of your sins, your transgressions, your iniquities'** in the sight of God. And through His Easter resurrection in 3 days Jesus has left behind for you His promise of everlasting life and the resurrection of the body for you and your loved ones who you've buried and commended to the Lord.

And in these days God has ordained for you, your short lifetime, in the stewardship of your body, in the life time God has given you God invites you to leave behind like the preacher to the hooker, like the hooker to her son = the message of God's Word, the Bible. **I Cor. 1 'We preach Christ crucified'**. Whether you're a farmer, a teacher, a preacher, a son, a Momma, whatever God has called you to be, all of us sinners have a purpose given life. And that purpose is to tell as many people as we can 'Jesus Christ ... the image of the invisible God ... in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell' is our crucified and living Savior. You are the Body of Christ = His Church with a mission and a purpose in your life!

'It's not what you take when you leave this world, it's what you leave behind you when you go' Leave the message of the love of Jesus Christ crucified in the lives of as many people as you can. What Jesus Christ has done for you and is doing through you His Body = the Holy Christian Church is what makes Good Friday truly good. Amen