

5 April 2017  
Lent 5 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“*Where in the World Is God? Under the Whip*”

Text: Isaiah 53:1-8; Matthew 27:24-31

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

***Who has believed what he has heard from us?*** That’s the question Isaiah asked.

We say that. When we see something or hear something so outrageous, so unbelievable, so crazy, we say: *I can’t believe it. Who can believe it?*

That’s what Isaiah is saying tonight. For as a prophet, he foresaw and wrote down what was going to happen to God’s Messiah. He would be pierced. He would be crushed. He would be chastised. He would be oppressed and judged, and finally, ***cut off out of the land of the living***. Or in others words, dead. Isaiah saw all that and thought to himself: *I can’t believe it. This can’t be right. This just can’t be right.*

But it was. And some 700 years after Isaiah foresaw all that and wrote it down, it happened. As we confess in the Apostles’ Creed: *He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. Jesus, the promised Messiah, the Son of God - God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God - went under the whip.*

First, he was scourged. Roman scourging was worse than mere whipping, as we think of it. The whips they used most often had small pieces of metal or even small hooks on the ends of the lashes to not only smack one’s skin and cause pain, but to penetrate the skin and agonizingly tear it away. And although we are not told here how many strokes Jesus received, commonly it was 40 minus 1 - because 40 was considered a death sentence. No one could endure that much.

Then after that, the soldiers had at Him. He was their plaything. They mocked Him in word and deed, dressing Him as a pauper king, with a crown made of thorns and a stick for a royal scepter. They knelt before Him in mock homage, even as their eyes despised Him and their lips jeered at Him. But not satisfied with that, they then took His scepter-stick and struck the crown of thorns on His head, making it sink deeper into His skin, and then spit on Him. *And for how long?* We’re not told that either. But once they grew tired of their game and playing with their prey, the hatred returned as they yanked the robe off of Him and led Him away to the cross.

How it all must have pierced not only Jesus' skin and muscles, but also His heart. Pilate washed his hands to absolve himself of any guilt, but Jesus wanted to wash him in the blood He was about to shed to give him a real absolution. The soldiers who treated Him like garbage were the very ones He wanted to save; wanted as His children. No matter what they did to Him, He would love them and want them no less.

And perhaps that's the real unbelievable thing of Isaiah here. Not the cruelty and inhumanity we humans can inflict - we see that; we know that full well. The real unbelievable thing here is **God's love**. That even under the whip, God is loving us and doing this for us. To save us. The Father offering up His Son. The Son willingly laying down His life. For sinners. For those who do stuff . . . like . . . this.

For it's not just Pilate and the soldiers . . . remember when Jesus said this: *Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me* (Matthew 25:40). He spoke those words *just two days* before all this happened. So . . . when we mock others, when we mistreat others, when we abuse and scorn others, when we sin against others, you might as well put a Roman toga on us. Or as Isaiah said: ***He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities.***

And so in our sin we rightly say: *Lord, have mercy*. And He does, and loves you, too. For, as Isaiah goes on to say: ***upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed . . . the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*** Peace and healing. That's what Jesus has for you. Peace with God and forgiveness for your sins. Or as we sang tonight (LSB #421): *Jesus, grant that balm and healing In Your holy wounds I find* (v. 1). *Every wound that pains or grieves me By Your wounds, Lord, is made whole* (v. 4). And *grant that in Your death I trust* (v. 5). Trust in Your suffering and death, that You did all this **for me**. Forgiveness for a sinner like me. Unbelievable.

And yet we believe. Not because of anything in us, but by this gift of God, too: His Holy Spirit. The Spirit who holds a crucified man, a crucified God, before our eyes and gives us the faith to say: *my Lord and my God*. To kneel before Him, scorning not Him but our sins, and washing not our hands to absolve ourselves, but our hearts in the blood He poured out to wash us, to receive His absolution. Our giving God keeps on giving. *Gifts* for a sinner like me. Unbelievable.

And then with His gifts of forgiveness and the Spirit comes this too. Two things; two promises. The first is this: that if they persecuted and rejected Him, they will persecute and reject those who come after Him, those who follow Him, as well. And perhaps you have felt that wrath, even, like Jesus, from those you are trying to help. Maybe not from a whip but from a *verbal* tongue lashing, and from mocking. But that hurts just as much, sometimes more. And maybe worse is coming along soon. And to be rejected by those you only want to help is tough. But expect that, Jesus says.

But I said there were two promises. And the second is this: that the forgiveness you have from Jesus will be the forgiveness you give to those who sin against you. Jesus will work that in you. The same compassion He had will live in you through His Word and gift. We pray for that in the Lord's Prayer. He gives it to us by His Spirit.

So that when we find ourselves in that position, on the receiving end of the world's rejection and perhaps persecution, we know we are not alone. *Where in the world is God?* The God of all compassion is with us. Jesus is with us, in love, under the whip, that we be with Him in glory.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.