

INI - SDG

Maundy Thursday

April 21, 2011

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church

Hecla, SD

Theme: Profiles of the Passion -

#7) Jesus - A Profile of Love

Text: Matthew 27:50 ***Jesus, when He had cried out again with a loud voice, yielded up His spirit.***

In the name of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who loved us, and gave Himself up for us, dear fellow redeemed in His name,

What does love look like? If I asked you right now to describe love or draw a picture of love, how would you describe it or picture it? Valentine's Day is a day of love and often love between two people is depicted with a heart-shaped symbol to represent that love that a person has in his or her heart for that other person. Or maybe the description of love you would give would be that of a man and woman, standing before God, pledging to be faithful to one another. A faithfulness that only death can separate. Maybe it is the bond between a parent and a child. Or maybe the image of love you have in your mind is an aged wife at her husband's bedside, holding his hands during his last moments of life. To different people, love will be described in different ways.

During our Mid-Week Lenten services we've been considering different profiles of the Passion. A profile is a brief depiction or description of someone. Many of our young people are familiar with this word "profile" thanks in part to Facebook and the profile pages they have. These pages describe things about people - such as their age, their interest, and the like. We considered the a profile of betrayal, a profile of lost opportunity, a profile of denial, a profile of unbelief, a profile of sinful convenience, and last week a profile of repentance.

Tonight, as we gather together during this week that is most sacred and dear to us Christians, we want to consider a profile of love. We all know that Jesus was loving. We see His love in everything He did. How He fed the 5,000 when they were hungry. How He healed those who were physically tormented by diseases and demons. How He took up the little children in His arms and blessed them. We see His love in raising to life again, the widow of Nain's only son who had died. But as we consider this profile of love, we will not be using any of those Scripture accounts. Instead we turn to the Word of God as recorded in Matthew 27, verse 50, where we read -

Jesus, when He had cried out again with a loud voice, yielded up His spirit.

So far the Word of God.

If you've ever read Genesis chapter 5, you've read a summery of life in this world. We read that Adam begot Seth, and he died. Seth begot Enosh, and he died. Enosh begot Cainan, and he died. And so, as chapter 5 of Genesis continues on recounting the genealogy of Adam

to Noah and Noah's three sons, we hear the story of lives beginning and lives ending.

Life and death. It really is the story of life in this world, isn't it. Sure none of us expect to live to be 930 years old like Adam or 969 years like Methuselah, but we all expect our beginning and ending to be the same as what we read in Genesis 5. We are here because our parents begot us and we will be here until we die. It has been this way since Adam and it will be this way until the Last Day. While we would much rather focus on the begetting of life, the birth of a new child, we know that death is a very real thing in our lives - something none of us can avoid or escape.

This is the result of being a descendant of Adam. When God created Adam, He created Adam in His image. An image of perfection, holiness, and righteousness. Death was not a part of the picture at that time. However, death was a threat for disobedience. After God created Adam, He told him that he was free to eat of any tree in the Garden which He had made. Except for one. ***"But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it (dying you shall die)."*** (Gen 2:17) Death would be the result of disobedience.

Yesterday in Confirmation class, we talked about what death is. Death is defined as a separation. When we speak of death, we are usually speaking of the soul separating from the body. However the Bible speaks of death in two other ways. The Bible speaks of eternal death, that is an eternal separation from God in hell. The Bible also speaks of a kind of death that was the immediate result of Adam's disobedience in the Garden - spiritual death. It is a spiritual separation from God while still living here on earth. While Adam was initially created in God's image of perfect righteousness and holiness, when Adam disobeyed and ate of the tree, he suffered spiritual death - a spiritual separation from the holy God because of His sin. Adam's rebellion also, ultimately led to his physical death as well at the age of 930.

Because of Adam's sin, none of his descendants have the image of God anymore - that is an image of perfect holiness and righteousness - but instead we all have the image of sinful Adam. In Genesis 5:3 we read, ***"And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth."*** Seth was born spiritually dead in his trespasses and sins. And so it has continued for all mankind. All of us are born spiritually separated from God, awaiting our physical death, and because of our sin an eternal separation from God in hell. ***"For the wages of sin is death,"*** Paul writes to the Romans (6:23).

So we have come to accept that death is just a part of life. A part of life for all of us, except for Jesus. What makes the death of Jesus a profile of love, is WHO it was that breathed His last and yielded up His spirit on Good Friday and WHY He breathed His last.

Though there are hundreds of deaths recorded in Scripture, there are none like the death of Jesus. The Roman centurions who were charged with supervising and carrying out the crucifixion of Jesus, had probably seen hundreds of crucifixions and they knew what to expect. But they had never seen anything like the death of Jesus. Jesus who prayed to His Father to forgive those who were crucifying Him. Jesus who cared for His mother from the cross. Jesus who assured another man being crucified for the crimes he committed of eternal life. No other death or crucifixion included three hours of darkness. Never had the earth quaked and the rocks split at the death of any other man. These things only at the death of Jesus. This led one of the Roman centurions even to proclaim at Jesus' death, ***"Truly this was the Son of God!"*** (Mt 27:54)

The death of Jesus was so different because Jesus was so different. Unlike every other person that had been born into this world, Jesus was not born of the sinful image of Adam. He had a human mother, but He was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Jesus was a true man, but He was also true God. John writes of Jesus, ***“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.”*** (Jn 1:4) As the Son of God, Jesus was FULL OF LIFE. As the Son of God, He was the author of life. Again, John records, ***“All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.”*** (Jn 1:3) Without the Son of God, there would be no life on this planet at all.

Yet what do we hear happened to the Author of Life? ***Jesus, when He had cried out again with a loud voice, yielded up His spirit.*** Jesus died. Not an unusual thing for any of us. But think for a moment on what a remarkable statement that is about Jesus! The Son of God, in whom was life, the One through whom all things were made, the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, DIED. Death is not a part of who God is.

But why? Why did the Son of God “yield up His spirit?” Why did the author of life breath His last and die? This is where we begin to see the profile of love that is Jesus. Jesus never disobeyed one of God’s commandments, though He never had a sinful thought or an unloving thought toward His neighbor. Paul writes that Jesus, “knew no sin.” Jesus had no personal experience with sin. And thus, having never sinned, He never earned the wages of sin - that is death.

Yet He dies. He dies a most horrible and wretched death. He dies because He loved us. While Jesus had no personal experience with sin Himself, we know a lot about sin. We were born in the sinful image of our first father, Adam. The Son of God knew we were born spiritually separated from God and unless He did something, we would be eternally separated from God in hell. And so He yielded up His spirit and breathed His last. He died so that we could live.

This was plan of the Triune God from the beginning. He didn’t want us to perish eternally, apart from Him. He wanted us to be in fellowship with Him forever. But God could not simply ignore our sin problem. He is a just God and justice requires that punishment for rebellion be carried out. And that is where the Son of God came in. It was either us or Him. Either we would be punished eternally for our rebellion, or the sinless Son of God would have to suffer and die in our place.

What happened? ***Jesus, when He had cried out again with a loud voice, yielded up His spirit.*** Jesus, the Son of God, died. God placed all our sins on His sinless Son and punished Him in our place. God ***made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us***, Paul writes. (2 Cor 5:21) We heard the Prophet Isaiah write of Jesus, ***“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 bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.”*** (Is 53:4-5)

THIS is what love looks like. Love looks like a lifeless Jesus on the cross. Jesus our Good Shepherd lays down His life to save the flock. On this night of Maundy Thursday, Jesus told His disciples, ***“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.”*** (Jn 15:13) What greater act of love could Jesus do than to lay down His life to save us? To endure the wrath of God against sin on the cross? To suffer hell on the cross so that we could go to heaven?

THIS is what a profile of love looks like: ***Jesus, when He had cried out again with a loud voice, yielded up His spirit.*** Praise be to our Savior Jesus! Amen!