

LAMENTATIONS 3:45 - 48, 55, 57

14th Sunday after Pentecost, September 2-4, 2023

Smith

Three Crosses

⁴⁵ **You have made us scum and refuse among the peoples.** ⁴⁶ **All our enemies rage against us.** ⁴⁷ **Panic and the pit have come, devastation and destruction.** ⁴⁸ **Rivers of tears flow from my eyes because of the destruction of the daughter of my people.** ⁵⁵ **I called on your name, O LORD, from the depths of the pit.** ⁵⁷ **You came near when I called you, and you said, ‘Do not fear.’**

This week the Confirmation Class is memorizing all 66 books of the Bible. We went through the books over and over again and they will have a test on Wednesday. One of the groups is the Major Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel and Daniel. Now, one of those-- Lamentations-- is not really a prophet, but a short book of five poems that we're pretty sure was written by one of the prophets, Jeremiah.

The book is about the outcry of the people of Judah in exile. And all through the book there are three crosses before our eyes. The first the most obvious: The cross or burden of the exiles in Babylon. The second cross is one we want to keep before us all the time: the cross of Jesus Christ, the cross of his pain and our shame. The third cross is how we respond to Jesus' suffering on our behalf: it is the cross of our own suffering and troubles, and this book helps us to put that cross-- or those crosses, for some people carry more than one-- in perspective. **But we begin with the first cross of Lamentations: the cross of the exiles.**

For four hundred years, from the long reign of Solomon to quick, staccato months of final kings of Judah, the people of God wasted generations chasing exploring a spirituality apart from the faith Moses taught. "They followed worthless idols, and so they became worthless themselves" (Jer. 2:5).

Their sinfulness, their experimentation with false religions, their "personal choices" that took them to religions that made them feel better about themselves, meant that to call them to repentance, God had to make them see how close they were to going to hell.

When we fail to pass our faith along to our children, what will happen to their faith? If the word isn't sown at all, then we have killed the souls of our children. When people let their children decide for themselves what church to join without being told what our church even teaches, will they choose right doctrine, Scriptural purity, and salvation by Christ alone? Won't they choose the religion that pretends to let them make choices, to do good works that give their souls credit in some way, or that seem more open to a modern lifestyle? They will

choose whatever is easier. An infant who is not made to breathe will not “choose” to breathe on her own when she is born. No! She will make no choice at all, and the result...?

This is why we point our children and ourselves to the cross of Christ, the second cross of our book, to remember just what was done there. The reason for the cross that Jesus was crucified on to pay the penalty, the price, of mankind’s sin. Each of our sins. Every one of our sins was laid on him, so that he became **refuse and scum among the peoples. His enemies raged against him. He called to the Father from depths of the pit--** and what answer did he receive? He cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsake me?” and God the Father had to remain silent. He had to let him die.

We might think of sins as being big or small, but sins all have the same price: the suffering of hell. Discontent with what we have? That’s a sin that is punished in hell alone; that’s a sin that Jesus paid the price for.

A little white lie? That’s a sin that is punished in hell alone; that’s a sin that Jesus paid the price for.

An offense against the Sixth Commandment? A little look at a naked picture? A chapter of a racy novel? A TV show that applauds the promiscuous and elevates divorce? That’s a sin that is punished in hell alone; that’s a sin that Jesus paid the price for.

What if something I do puts drugs or guns or the fentanyl from my hip surgery into the hands of someone who shouldn’t have it-- as if it’s for me to prescribe? Is that a mistake? That’s a sin that is punished in hell alone; that’s a sin that Jesus paid the price for.

His suffering led to his death. Not his inconvenience. Not his vacation. Not his time-out. His death. The purposes of the incarnation of Jesus Christ were first: To display God’s glory in saving us, and second, to accomplish that salvation through the body, spirit, work, and suffering of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity.

This is why the angels sang, “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace and good will toward all mankind” (Luke 2:14). He came on account of our sinful problem, this mess of death and death and no way out that sin brought on. **“Rivers of tears,”** our passage prophecies, **“rivers of tears flow from my eyes because of the destruction of the daughter of my people.”** This is the compassion of God, his stomach churning and agonizing with pity and sympathy for what sin did to his creatures.

And so he has rescued us, he has lifted us like drowning sailors into the lifeboat. And now, having saved us from what would have been punishment, torture, and agony in hell, he also gives us comfort the way a person saved from drowning is given a warm blanket, a drink of cold water, dry clothes, and encouragement.

This brings us to the third cross. The third cross is the cross of the Christian, every day of our lives. This is actually the first cross mentioned in the Bible, when Jesus said, “If anyone wants to follow me, let him deny himself, pick up his cross, and follow me” (Mk 8:34), which was many months, almost a year, before he was crucified.

The cross of the Christian does not accomplish what the Lord’s suffering accomplished. Jesus paid the penalty for our sins. We suffer simply because we follow him. But think of the cross as the terrible burden of suffering, and we begin to understand that we don’t like to suffer, we don’t want to bear a burden that will hurt.

We want to make adjustments to the heavy load, to make corrections. But the burdens we bear are not the kinds of things that can be adjusted or corrected. The world will go on hating us because the world hates Christ.

“Whatever we suffer as a result of our connection to Christ”¹ is this cross. Whatever we suffer because we follow him is this cross. We deny ourselves and we trust in Jesus. Jeremiah’s words come as unexpected comfort here: **“You came near when I called you, and you said, ‘Do not fear.’”**

The many fears we have about our crosses are that they will get worse, that they will be so unthinkable that we will somehow not ever be able to bear them. But our Lord Jesus says: Do not fear. Whatever burdens we carry on account of Christ are a way we have to thank him, and he loves that; he loves us. And the crosses we carry-- fear, opposition, pain, oppression, helplessness, abuse, suffering, dying, losing, grieving-- a whole rack of crosses stacked ominously for us and our future.

“But I am with you,” our Savior tells us. He will help us to shoulder the burden. All our guilt and the consequences of our sin are destroyed on the cross of Christ, and we are lifted up to serve him, whatever crosses we bear, to give God glory, and to show the world that this one who hefts this heavy load in the name of Jesus, has the promise of everlasting life. Amen.

¹ Deutschlander, *Your Kingdom Come* p. 242