

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Good Friday

March 30, 2018

Meditation by Pastor Jon D. Buchholz

By his wounds we are healed

—Isaiah 53:4-6

It all seems so natural, doesn't it? I mean the world we live in and the people around us. It all seems so normal. There are haves and there are have-nots. There are people who make millions on Wall Street and people who make pennies waiting tables. There are people who sit down to feast at well-laid tables, and there are people who pick through garbage heaps for life-sustaining scraps of food. There are people who load their shopping carts with abundant produce, and there are people who pick the lettuce that feeds them. There are people who lie down at night in comfortable beds in secure homes, and there are people who seek shelter under a tree in a public park. There are children who grow up loved and cherished, and there are children who are abused. There are women who are successful and highly respected, and there are women who are trafficked for their bodies. We see the news, and very little of it is good. In response to another act of violence people lock their homes and lock their cars and take measures to protect their children from harm. And it becomes the new normal. We get used to it. It's just the way things are. But it's not the way things are supposed to be.

It all seems so normal, doesn't it? I mean the way we are, the way we think and the way we act. Our self-serving narcissism seems so natural. Our love of money and pleasure, ambition and success, our idolatry of self seems so American and so legitimate. The vile words that spew from our lips in moments of frustration or anger seem so justifiable. Our sinful flirtations seem so enticing, and the casual glances we cast at others seem so alluring. The hurtful things we say about others when we gossip or betray a confidence seem so virtuous. The garbage that we allow into our homes through our computers, tablets and televisions seems so entertaining. Our lazy self-indulgence seems so well-deserved. Our indifference toward God's Word, our neglect of his Sacrament, our lack of love for Jesus seem so indifferent. We know we're not perfect, and we know we should probably change some things, but it's normal. We're comfortable. It's just the way things are. But it's not the way things are supposed to be.

What we see around us and what we see in us are symptoms, symptoms of human beings who have turned away from God. This is not the path God marked out for us. We've left the path that God set before us, the path of righteousness, justice, kindness, the path of perfect love for God and for our neighbor. We left that path because we thought we know better. We're smarter than God; we've got it all figured out. *We all like sheep have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way.* We've gone off to frolic in the pastures of wickedness. We've blazed our own trail through a desolate wilderness that leaves us desperate and thirsty. We can complain to God about the misery we inflict upon ourselves. We can complain to God about how unfair it is. After all, we were corrupt from conception; we inherited this evil within from our sinful parents. But God's justice stands. We can be angry at God, but it accomplishes nothing. The problem is not with God; it is with us. We can ignore God, but the charges against us stand.

The sin that lurks in our nature is a terminal cancer. It's a deadly venom that courses through our veins. It saps our strength and robs us of life. It festers inside us, it causes us to rot from within, it fills our mortal bodies with corruption, and it returns us to dust. Our solution is to try to heal ourselves. Surely, if we can make up for our sins with acts of kindness and charity, that has to even the score, doesn't it? Surely if we can turn over a new leaf and be better people tomorrow that will score points with God, won't it? Surely if God can see how hard we're trying and how sincere and committed we are, our good intentions must count for something, don't they? No, the problem is beyond our healing. There is no surgery that can root out the sin that infects us. There is no chemo that can heal the cancer within. We are fatally flawed, and no self-inflicted wound, no suffering, no self-sacrifice, self-denial, no good intentions, no best efforts can do anything to fix the problem. So finally in this world of injustice and inequality that we ourselves have created and are part of, each one of us must face justice, and we must all meet the great equalizer. The wages of our sin is death, and each of us has earned his due. Death is the default. This is what awaits every human soul. There is nothing we can do to rescue ourselves from the inevitable outcome of decline, death and destruction.

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! If you think of sin lightly, look at the

cross. Look at the anguish your Savior suffered. This is the price of what we consider normal. This is the price of man's rebellion against God. This is the price of my sin and yours. These are the wages of iniquity. This is death. He bore my sin and yours under the wrath of God, abandoned to the depths of hell for the sin of the world.

If you ever doubt God's love for you, look at the cross. God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). *He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.* We contemplate the cross of Jesus, and we can only bow in reverent awe at what God accomplished there through the suffering and death of his only-begotten Son. The heart that only beat with love was pierced with a spear. The hands that only ever gave selflessly, that only touched and healed with perfect kindness, were driven through with nails and affixed to the cross. The head that never conceived of a selfish or malicious thought was pressed down with a crown of thorns. The innocent, obedient, and perfectly pure Son of God was declared unclean and cast away. The blood that flowed from his wounds was healing balm to heal the mortal wounds of our soul. Jesus was flogged, pierced and crucified, his wounds were laid open, so that *by his wounds we are healed.*

This is God's great exchange, the great substitution that satisfies divine justice and pours out divine mercy. The Righteous One takes the place of the wicked; the Innocent One steps in for the guilty. It happened on a Roman cross on a hill outside Jerusalem. The Passover Lamb was sacrificed. The offering for sin was presented to the Father, and atonement for the world was made. *By his wounds we are healed.*

I'll say it again: *By his wounds we are healed.* The work of Jesus is done. His healing is complete. Your sins are forgiven. No sin was overlooked. No evil deed was left unpardoned. He died for the people who spit on him, for Pilate who condemned him, for the crowds who mocked him, for the soldiers who nailed him to the cross, for the disciples who denied and abandoned him. He died for all. And since he died for all, I know he died for me. And he died for you. Jesus' blood was spilled, and his love reached out to you. *By his wounds we are healed.*

Do you know that there's a part of me that still wants to continue sinning? Yes, my sinful nature still lurks inside me, just as it does within you. It remains unloving and unconverted, a restless evil within that cares nothing about Jesus and his cross and wants nothing of forgiveness. That sinful nature within needs to be beaten down and driven back. It needs to be drowned every day in sorrow and repentance, as we relive our baptism, so that every day we receive God's Spirit and power to live a new life of love. Dear friends, flee for refuge to God's infinite mercy revealed in the death of his Son, Jesus Christ. Flee to the cross, and let the blood that flowed from Jesus' wounds cleanse you from all sin. Fall down before your King, as he is enthroned on the tree on Calvary, and in humility and repentance receive his loving pardon. *By his wounds we are healed. By his death we live. Look to Jesus and live. Amen.*