

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Good Friday
March 29, 2024
Sermon by Pastor Gary A. Pufahl
God's great exchange.

Look, my servant will succeed. He will rise. He will be lifted up. He will be highly exalted. ¹⁴ Just as many were appalled at him—his appearance was so disfigured that he did not look like a man, and his form was disfigured more than any other person—¹⁵ so he will sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him, because they will see something they had never been told before, and they will understand something they had never heard before.

^{53:1} Who has believed our report, and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

² He grew up before him like a tender shoot and like a root from dry ground. He had no attractiveness and no majesty. When we saw him, nothing about his appearance made us desire him. ³ He was despised and rejected by men, a man who knew grief, who was well acquainted with suffering. Like someone whom people cannot bear to look at, he was despised, and we thought nothing of him.

⁴ Surely he was taking up our weaknesses, and he was carrying our sufferings. We thought it was because of God that he was stricken, smitten, and afflicted, ⁵ but it was because of our rebellion that he was pierced. He was crushed for the guilt our sins deserved. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. ⁶ We all have gone astray like sheep. Each of us has turned to his own way, but the LORD has charged all our guilt to him.

⁷ He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. Like a lamb he was led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent in front of its shearers, he did not open his mouth. ⁸ He was taken away without a fair trial and without justice, and of his generation, who even cared? So, he was cut off from the land of the living. He was struck because of the rebellion of my people. ⁹ They would have assigned him a grave with the wicked, but he was given a grave with the rich in his death, because he had done no violence, and no deceit was in his mouth.

¹⁰ Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and to allow him to suffer. Because you made his life a guilt offering, he will see offspring.

He will prolong his days, and the LORD's gracious plan will succeed in his hand. ¹¹ After his soul experiences anguish, he will see the light of life. He will provide satisfaction. Through their knowledge of him, my just servant will justify the many, for he himself carried their guilt. ¹² Therefore I will give him an allotment among the great, and with the strong he will share plunder, because he poured out his life to death, and he let himself be counted with rebellious sinners. He himself carried the sin of many, and he intercedes for the rebels.

—Isaiah 52:13-53:12

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Armies! The whole earth is full of his glory!” (Isaiah 6:3). The angels proclaimed those words as they covered their faces with two wings and they covered their feet with two wings. With two wings they were flying above the throne of God where he was seated with all power, glory, and honor. The prophet Isaiah saw the LORD seated on the throne, and he fell over like a dead man. He was certain that he was ruined because he was in the presence of the LORD of Armies. He was a sinner in the presence of God. This is the LORD. This is the God of all majesty and glory and power. This is the LORD, the great I AM before whom angels hide their faces and humans bow in humility and fear. This is the LORD, this is Jesus, who once said, **“Before Abraham was born, I am”** (John 8:58).

Brothers and sisters, that is the one we see on the cross today. The angels gazed upon the Lord with awe and humility, and 2000 years ago they watched with wonder and bewilderment. The LORD of Armies was cloaked in humility and disgrace. The people did not, they could not see Jesus for who he is and for what he came to do. The crowds that stirred with excitement just five days earlier now gathered with hatred in their voice. **“Crucify him. Crucify him.”**

Jesus, the Son of God, was crucified. And as Jesus hung on that cross, people were so disgusted with what they saw. Isaiah saw it all so clearly 700 years earlier. **“His appearance was so disfigured that he did not look like a man, and his form was disfigured more than any other person.” “He had no attractiveness and no majesty. When we saw him, nothing about his appearance made us desire him.”** As we look at Jesus hanging on the cross, we see a despicable man. Men mocked, and taunted, and jeered him. There was nothing in his appearance that would attract us to him.

As Jesus hung on that cross, he was **“like someone whom people cannot bear to look at.”** People looked at Jesus the way they looked at the lepers. His disfigurement was so grotesque that people could not even bear to look at him. They were so appalled by him.

In the throne room of God the angels had to look away because of his glory and majesty. But on this day, on the day we call “Good Friday,” as the Son of God hung on a cross, humans looked away because of shame and disgust.

But that was only part, a small part, of Jesus’ suffering. Not only did he experience great shame, he also suffered great, excruciating physical pain. Imagine what Jesus went through. Put yourself in Jerusalem 2000 years ago. Can you feel the vibrations of the soldiers’ hammers pounding the nails through Jesus’ hands? **“It was because of our rebellion that he was pierced.”** Can you hear the mockery that the soldiers hurled on Jesus as they slapped and spit upon his face? **“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth.”** Can you see the snap of the whip as the soldiers tore the flesh off of Jesus’ back? **“He was stricken, smitten, and afflicted.”**

But as awful as Jesus’ physical pain was, it paled in comparison to the spiritual pain that he went through. Imagine it! He had the sins of the whole world on his shoulders, on his conscience. His physical torment: the cuts, the ripped skin, the lacerated muscles, the crown of thorns, the nails, the mockery – oh, his physical pain was great. But it was a very minor part of all the suffering that Jesus endured.

How unbearable the burden must have been for Jesus, on whom God laid the sins of every single human being from the time of Adam to the end of the world! The guilt of Cain, the slaughter of Nero, the horror of Hitler, the massacre of Bin Laden, yes, the disgust of my sins. ALL on Jesus’ shoulders and conscience.

We often feel so guilty about own sins. So very often the burden and the guilt of what we have done weigh heavily in our conscience. Imagine what it was like for Jesus to have all the sins of all people piled on him.

“We all have gone astray like sheep. Each of us has turned to his own way, but the LORD has charged all our guilt to him.” ⁷ **He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. Like a lamb he was led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent in front of its shearers, he did not open his mouth.”** Had it not been for the sustaining power of his divine nature, Christ’s human nature would never have been able to bear the crushing load of the sins of the whole world.

And yet, Jesus **“was crushed for the guilt our sins deserved.”** God’s judgment crushed him. God pierced him. God punished him. God cursed Jesus. And on that cross, during these hours of darkness, Jesus cried, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.”**

Here was a Father and his Son who had perfect unity and harmony but now was separated. It wasn’t just the church who turned its back on Jesus. It wasn’t just his friends. It wasn’t just his enemies. His own Father turned his back on him. Jesus was literally *all alone*. Why? Because on top of him were all *my* sins and all *your* sins and all the sins of the entire world, the sins that bring with them the just penalty of hell.

On that Good Friday, God made the Holy Jesus to be sin. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:21, **“God made him, who did not know sin, to become sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.”** We can look at Jesus and say that those sins on his shoulders are no longer ours, but they are his. God piled all our sins upon Jesus. But not only did God put all our sins upon him, he also has credited the perfect life of Jesus to us.

This is how it was planned. God planned this from the beginning. 700 years earlier Isaiah saw it and testified to it. This was not a mistake. This was not happenchance. This was exactly according to plan because this was the only way you and I could be saved. This was the only way God could forgive the sins of the world.

Martin Luther once wrote, **“How amazing it is that the Son of God becomes my servant, that he humbles himself, so that he cumpers himself with my misery and sin, yes, with the sin and death of the entire world! He says to me: ‘You are no longer a sinner, but I am. I am your substitute. You have not sinned, but I have. The entire world is in sin. However, you are not in sin; but I am. All your sins are to rest on me and not on you.’”**

Doctor Luther also prayed, **“Lord Jesus, you are my righteousness. I am your sin. You became what you were not and made me to be what I was not.”** What a great exchange! Don’t you think?

Only because God himself became sin for us is there any hope of life for us. We never have to suffer the torment that Jesus went through on that Good Friday so long ago. **“The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.”**

When Jesus cried out the words from the cross, **“It is finished,”** God’s great exchange was made complete. Those are words of victory, not defeat. Jesus was saying, “You, world, are now saints in the eyes of God. When he looks at you, he sees only perfection. Because I became sin, you now are saints. Believe it.”

We did nothing to cause this great exchange. But this is definitely an exchange we want to take place. It’s an exchange that we’re thankful did take place. God’s great exchange consists in God making Jesus sin and thereby

making us saints. The punishment that we deserved because of our sins became Jesus' punishment. The perfect life and holiness that Jesus had became our righteousness. Because of God's great exchange, we can sing with the hymn writer, "**Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness My beauty are, my glorious dress. With these before my God I'll stand When I shall reach the heavenly land.**" Amen.