

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Midweek Lent 6
March 25, 2026
Sermon by Pastor Jon D. Buchholz
Look at the one who was pierced

—Zechariah 12:10-11

It was late in the afternoon on that fateful Friday we call Good. It was getting close to sunset, the hour when the Sabbath would begin. The Jews didn't want three dying men hanging from crosses on the Sabbath, so they wanted to speed up the death of the three men who had been crucified. Pontius Pilate gave orders to have the legs of the victims broken. With their legs broken, the men hanging on the cross could no longer push themselves up to catch their breath, and asphyxiation followed quickly; they choked to death. So the soldiers broke the legs of the malefactors on the right and the left, but when they came to the one called Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews, they found that he was already dead. You see, when Jesus was crucified, nobody took Jesus' life from him. In his own time and on his own terms he laid down his life and breathed his last. Since Jesus was already dead, instead of breaking Jesus' legs, one of the soldiers thrust his spear into Jesus' side. In doing so, the soldier unwittingly brought about the fulfillment of two prophecies: "Not one of his bones will be broken" (Numbers 9:12) and "They will look at the one they pierced" (Zechariah 12:10). It's that second prophecy, foretold by Zechariah, that we focus on today.

Jesus was a wretched sight. Blood dripped from his brow, where the crown of thorns had pressed into his head. Blood dripped from his hands and feet, where nails had pierced him and held him to the cross. And now a thrust of the soldier's spear brought forth a sudden flow of blood and water. It is a gruesome sight. Crucifixion was a messy, gory business. It was a tragic sight. The victim who died had been perfectly innocent of all wrongdoing. It was a terrible sight, the kind of sight that would make any rational human being turn away in horror and disgust. But Zechariah doesn't tell us to turn away. "*They will look on the one they pierced.*" Look at him! Don't turn away. Look at him!

Why is he there? Why is his pierced, lifeless body hanging on that cross? The answer is simple and hard-hitting. He's there because you put him there, and so did I. It was our hands that drove the spikes deep into Jesus' hands and feet—our hands raised in rebellion and defiance against God our Maker. Jesus hangs on the cross for you and for me, for the many times God said, "You shall not . . ." and we replied, "But I want to, and I shall," and for the many times God said, "You shall . . ." and we replied, "But I don't feel like it, so I won't." One soldier thrust the spear into Jesus' side, but the sin of the world drove it home. The Prophet Isaiah writes, "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" (Isaiah 53).

Shouldn't we be pierced? Shouldn't we suffer under the eternal wrath of God? Shouldn't we be cast into outer darkness because of the weight of our sins and the stench of our guilt? Instead, the innocent victim steps in, and he takes our place. He stands between us and the righteous wrath of God, and he himself bears the righteous fury. Look at him! He's not just the victim of human execution; he's the one chosen to be the sin-bearer, to carry the weight of the world, to assume the sin of the world and carry it all away. Look at him! Look at the one they pierced! "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

We confess what this all means each time we speak the words of the Nicene Creed: For *us* and for *our* salvation, he came down from heaven. For *our* sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate. We look at Jesus on the cross, and we see the price of sin—the sin that we consider so trivial. Our little peccadillos seem so insignificant, yet with each one we break we again become a lawbreaker, guilty of violating God's holy, perfect, moral law. Each transgression, each violation, each offense, earns for us the sentence of death because the wages of sin *is* death. So look at him! Look at the one who was pierced for our transgressions. But don't just stand and gawk mindlessly. Look at him and reflect. Reflect on the price of sin you so easily downplay. Look at him and repent. Weep and mourn, grieve over your sins, as you look on the one you have pierced.

But tonight, as we reflect on Zechariah's prophecy, I want you to do more than look *at* the one you have pierced. The Lord invites us to look *to* the one we have pierced. Speaking through Zechariah, the Lord declares: "I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced." The LORD, our gracious God, has not only poured out on us a spirit of grace and supplication; he has poured out on us *the* Spirit of grace and supplication. The Holy Spirit, whom God has given us, points us to Jesus, so that we look to Jesus for forgiveness, pardon, peace, and salvation. We look to Jesus, and these gifts flow from his wounds and from his bitter death like an eternal waterfall. That's right—when we gaze upon Jesus the Lamb of God, we not only see the costly price of our own sin and rebellion, but we see the price paid in full.

For the forgiveness of our sins, for rescue from Satan and hell, for victory over death, for immortality—the gift of life that never ends—where else can we look? You can't look to yourself. You can't hold up the good works you have done and claim that they can satisfy God's just anger for your sins and get you through the gates into heaven. You can't trust in your circumstances and think that because you can pay your bills or enjoy a comfortable retirement that means God must be happy with you. You can't use your good health and good looks as the basis for your confidence that God is pleased with you. Where can you look? Where can you look for the sure and certain promise that your sins are forgiven and you stand forgiven and righteous before God? When you reach the end of your life, and it's time to draw your last breath, where can you look for the rock-solid certainty that when you close your eyes in death here on earth there is an eternal mansion waiting for you in heaven? Where can you look?

You can only look to Jesus. Look to the one who was pierced! His bloody death wasn't just the image of pity, it was the price of freedom. The blood he shed is the blood of the covenant that sealed your redemption and guarantees your good standing with God the Father. There is no other place to look. Only Jesus forgives your sins. Only Jesus opens our access to the Father's throne. Only Jesus is coming again to take you home. There is no other. There is only Jesus! Look to the one who was pierced!

And because you're not in heaven yet, look to the one who was pierced to shepherd you and guide you along the way to glory. It's a difficult journey of life between now and the time when the Lord calls you home. Satan continues to tempt you. Your flesh continues to try to lead you astray. The world continues to try to deceive you. You may be threatened. You may be persecuted. You may face adversity and suffer for the Name of Jesus. So look to the one who was pierced. As the writer to the Hebrews says, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (Hebrews 12:2,3).

The thrust of a spear and the sudden flow of blood and water confirmed what the soldiers already knew to be true: Jesus of Nazareth really was dead. Crucifixion had been successful. Jesus' life had come to an end. That's why the thrust of a spear was so significant: Jesus had not just gone unconscious; he was not in a swoon; he wasn't faking his demise. He was dead. And because he was really dead, and his lifeless body was placed in a tomb, what came on the third day was the miracle of miracles: the dead Jesus rose to life again and burst forth from his tomb victorious over death. His resurrection is God's testimony to the world that Jesus' sacrifice was complete, that the price for sin was paid, that Jesus really is the Son of God, that Satan is defeated, that heaven really is open to all believers. "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Romans 4:25).

He died. He rose. Sin is defeated. God wins. Your sins are forgiven. Eternal life with Jesus in heaven is yours. Look on the one who was pierced and see the price that God willingly paid, as he sacrificed his dearest treasure, Jesus Christ. Look to the one who was pierced, and see your salvation, your redemption, your hope. Amen.