

Good Friday  
April 19, 2019  
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church  
**The Crosses of Lent: The Passion Cross – Passion**

**John 19:17-18**

*Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). Here they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

Glory. Good Friday is a day of glory.

Suffering. Good Friday is a day of suffering.

The second statement is a little easier to understand. Tonight is a night to commemorate the suffering of Christ. The cross of Lent before us tonight reminds us of Christ's suffering. It is called the Passion Cross and is often formed by intersecting nails. Any cross will remind us of Christ's suffering. A cross made of the objects that would pierce his hands and feet especially reminds us of his suffering.

Tonight, as we meditate upon Christ's suffering, may we also see his glory. For Good Friday is both a day of suffering and of glory.

In current English, the word passion very often means a strong emotion. It can be either love or hatred, but it is a very strong feeling. We use the word passion in church in the older sense of the word. Merriam-Webster labels this definition of passion as obsolete. People seldom mean suffering when they say passion today. But that is what we mean. The passion cross is the cross of suffering. The Passion History readings we hear each Lenten season are the readings that tell us of the suffering and death of Christ. Passion means suffering. The two verses of our text tell us of the culmination of Christ's suffering.

*Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). Here they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle.*

His face is bruised and swollen from their fists. It is raw from where they pulled out his beard. Blood covers his head from the crown of thorns they beat into his head. His back is shredded from the whip. And on his back is the very instrument upon which he will die. The rough cross digs into his bloody back with every step. There is nothing PG about the scene. This is pain. This is suffering. This is the passion of Christ.

700 years before Good Friday, Isaiah spoke of this terrible day. "*He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*" (Isaiah 53:2–3). This is the part of the movie where we look down because it is too terrible to see. And if we were there as friends of Jesus, could we have looked upon Jesus as he carried his own cross out to Golgotha?

His enemies could look upon his suffering with delight. They thought he was getting what he deserved for daring to call himself the Son of God. They thought they were getting rid of a troublemaker for Israel. Maybe some of the people who saw Jesus in this time of intense suffering were ignorant of the motives of the Jewish leaders and the accusations against Jesus. But he must have done something horrible to deserve such treatment. Isn't that what we humans naturally think? When someone suffers so terribly, they must have done something to deserve it.

And then we think of our own sin. We have done something horrible. We have done many horrible somethings. We spit in God's face when we know his commandments and willfully ignore them. We strike the Son of God in the face when we cover one sin with another. We put the heavy cross upon his back to carry when we refuse to take responsibility for our sin. It is our sin that causes Christ's passion. It is my sin that causes the innocent Jesus to suffer. Tonight we see clearly that the what God said to Adam and Eve in

the Garden was true. If you sin, you will surely die. Ezekiel tells us that the soul who sins is the one to die. Paul warns us that the wages of sin is death. God does not make idle threats. Sin leads to death.

Jesus suffers on Good Friday more than anyone has ever suffered. For Christ is suffering not for his sins, but for yours and mine. He is suffering not only for our sins, but for the sins of the world. He tastes death for all of Adam's descendants. There is no suffering like his.

But it is interesting that the apostle John does not refer to the passion of Christ in his Gospel. John does not use that word for suffering even one time in his Gospel. Instead he writes of Jesus' glory. John records what Jesus says to his disciples about his upcoming crucifixion.

*"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." (John 12:27–28)*

Jesus goes to the cross to suffer in order to bring glory to his Father. Jesus' greatest desire was to bring his Father glory and that meant to accomplish his Father's great plan. The great plan of his Father was devised before time began. It was first expressed to humans after Adam and Eve sinned. For then the Lord promised a Savior to destroy the work of the devil. The Lord continued to reveal his great plan through prophets, priests and kings. He kept promising a Savior to bless all nations. He sustained his people and his promise through the rising and falling of great nations. He promised a Savior who would be the suffering servant. And finally the Son of God was born into our humanity. And at the cross of suffering he brought glory to his Father by accomplishing God's great plan. The plan was to save you from sin, death and the devil. Jesus says it like this:

*"Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do." (John 17)*

At the cross of suffering, we see Jesus accomplish the work of his Father. He saves us. He crushes the devil. He forgives sin. He gives eternal life to all who know Christ. The cross of suffering is the cross of glory. Glory to the Father who wants all to be saved. Glory to the Son who gave his life to save all. And the cross means future glory for all who trust in Christ.

Jesus said earlier in John's Gospel: *"Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself."* (John 12:31–32)

The Romans purposely put the place of crucifixions on a public road so that people would see what happens to those who rebel against the government. If one could go another way in or out of Jerusalem, most people would choose to avoid Golgatha, the place of the Skull. Only a few people would be drawn to a place of intense and prolonged suffering as there is with crucifixion.

Yet, in the years since Jesus was lifted up from the place of the Skull on the cross, he has drawn millions upon millions to himself. We are among the believers who have been drawn to the cross of Christ. Many believers are gathered to contemplate Christ's cross of suffering around the world on this very night. We are not here because we like suffering. We are not drawn to the cross because we like talking about Christ's suffering. Instead we are drawn to Christ's cross of suffering because it is also the cross that brings glory to God and eternal life to us. To God alone be the glory.

Amen.