

Good Friday—Tenebrae
15 April, Anno Domini 2022
St. John 19:1-42
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father and of the +Son and of the Holy Spirit.

The Law was certainly clear. “Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. Whoever blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him.” The Jews were right. The Name of God is not to be misused. It’s glory is not to be given to another. Blasphemy had to be punished by death, but under Roman rule, they weren’t allowed to carry out the death penalty.

This was the chief accusation leveled against Jesus. If it were true, it would justify the demands for Jesus’ death. He made Himself out to be the Son of God. He claimed for Himself the authority to forgive sins, which only God can do because all sin is against Him as the One who created us, the One whose Law we transgress and Name we defile. He actually claimed that He was the great I AM who was before Abraham, who spoke to Moses in the burning bush, and who redeemed Israel from Egypt. He quoted prophecies as though they were about Him. Yet this blasphemer ate with tax collectors and prostitutes. He had the audacity to go around having mercy on the afflicted on the Sabbath. He spoke with Samaritan women. God simply doesn’t do these things. God is holy and righteous. He is perfect and can only be approached by those who obey His commands and keep the Law. These sinners weren’t God’s people. They were outcasts, rejects.

And today, the God revealed in Jesus, is still accused of the very same thing. I don’t mean the Jesus of self-indulgent “love” that is so often held before us today. I don’t mean the Jesus that is presented as the one who threw the entire Law of God under the bus. Everyone likes that Jesus. He wouldn’t have been crucified. That Jesus pats you on the head when you blaspheme Him and despise His Word. That Jesus never makes uncomfortable demands upon you like “Don’t be angry even with your enemy. Don’t even look lustfully at woman because that is adultery. Don’t cheat your boss. Don’t forsake the gathering of God’s people. Don’t

worship any other gods.” The problem is, that’s not Jesus. Those who preach that kind of a Jesus are the ones truly guilty of blasphemy because they proclaim a God who doesn’t exist, a God who simply tells people that their sin is acceptable and pleasing in God’s sight, your personal truth. They attach God’s name to that which isn’t God.

The Jesus that the Jews hated, the Jesus that the world hates, the Jesus that makes our sinful flesh squirm, the real one, is the Jesus that stood silently in the face of the lies, the Jesus that refused to retaliate and call down legions of angels against the dogs and bulls of Bashan that surrounded Him to tear Him apart, the Jesus who willingly and gladly accepted all the accusations that should have been and rightfully could have been made against you. This is the Jesus that raises the anger of sinners because this Jesus strips away all claims to self-righteousness. This Jesus embodies a God who has mercy on the sick, the weak, and the broken. This Jesus reveals a God who wants to save sinners. And this is the God that Satan hates, because this is the God that robs Satan of his prey.

You see, God has a Law and by that Law, you must die. By that Law you belong with all the condemned under Satan’s jurisdiction. It is you that has risen against God and tried to cast off His rule by becoming a Law unto yourself. It is you who has tried to rob God of His glory by vainly thinking that your sins are somehow less offensive to God than anyone else’s. You rebel against His Law of love by treating your enemies, neighbors, friends, and family with disdain. You have minimized the grace of God by thinking that either your sin is too great or that it is of no real consequence. It is you who have cursed, coveted, idolized, despised, and lusted. By the holy and righteous Law of God the just wages of your sin must be paid - in full.

But you will not be the one to pay. Jesus knew full-well that His accusers, not He, deserved to die. They, like you, were the ones blaspheming God by rejecting the person, preaching, and working of His Son, Jesus. They deserved to be rejected by God and cast into eternal darkness and destruction. But Jesus loved them. Jesus loves you. He accepted the charges and the punishment. He allowed Himself to be branded as your scapegoat, your lamb of atonement so that the Law that condemned you might condemn Him instead. That is the true God, who takes your guilt and

your condemnation far more seriously than you do because He also takes His Father's love for you and His desire to rescue you from eternal judgement far more seriously.

This blessed exchange, as it has been called, is the whole cause of our hope and peace. The Son of God for the sinner. The guiltless for the guilty. The blasphemed for the blasphemer. The Law is satisfied. No judgement for sin remains for those who by the grace of Baptism have been united with Jesus in His death. No judgment of the Law remains to condemn you. Satan the accuser can level all the charges against you he wants, but they are no longer true of you. They were made true of Jesus and it is that death that has drawn us here this night. More than that, He has risen. And now He stands before His Father with pierced hands and pierced feet interceding for you. He cries out to God in the midst of your tears and your pain. He calls upon your Father to aid you in your affliction and temptation. He sees the Father's comfort for you in the midst of your fear. And at your Father's bidding He comes to be in your midst, to speak peace to your terrified heart, to strengthen your weak hands, to bind up your wounds with His precious absolution. And that you might have confidence, that your wavering faith might be buoyed up, He gives you the very thing that saves you - His Body and His Blood - by which your sins have been removed from you and your enemies have all been ground into the dust.

Dear children of God, do not let the darkness of your guilt and the depth of your sin against the Law take your eyes away from the one who hung upon Calvary's cross for you. "It is finished." Jesus Himself has said it. Your salvation has been entirely accomplished. Receive from Christ His forgiveness and His righteousness. He truly IS the Son of God whose death has brought you eternal life.

In the Name of +Jesus. Amen.