

Good Friday Tenebrae  
7 April, Anno Domini 2023  
St. John 18:1-19:42

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Children of the Light,

The darkness will not tolerate the truth. The darkness does not even desire to know or believe the truth. It does not want to hear the truth nor does it want anyone else to hear it. False doctrine will always wage fierce war against the true Christian doctrine and thus against God and His Christ and His Church. The reason is simple - true doctrine and false doctrine have opposing goals. True doctrine seeks the glory of God and the salvation man. False doctrine seeks the glory of man and the condemnation of God. Thus the Sanhedrin revile the Son of God, the true light that had come into the world to save the world. The free grace of God is repugnant to the self-righteous sinner.

If the Jews had honestly judged Jesus according to the Law, if they had judged His preaching against the preaching of Isaiah, they would have to confess that Jesus committed no sins of life or teaching and that Jesus' preaching was the fulfillment of all the prophets' preaching. They knew the Law, but were completely blind to it. And more than blind to the truth, they hated the truth. The truth that was revealed in Christ was a direct frontal attack on the self-righteousness in which they trusted. They would not be told otherwise, even if it condemned them.

The truth? There is a Law. A Divine Law authored and given by the very One they were trying to condemn with it. And by that Law, they and we ought to die. We, unlike Christ, have made ourselves out to be what we are not - good and righteous. We have flaunted the Law, picking and choosing when it applies and when it doesn't. We have sought to be masters of the Law, even seeking to overthrow God. And Scripture is very clear about those who would dare set themselves against God and defy His Holy Word - they are to die under the full weight of God's wrath against their sin.

However, the Jews were right about something. According to the Law Jesus ought to die, just not for the reasons the Jews imagined, not because Jesus had broken the Law. He ought to die, it pleased Him to die, because He is exactly who He made Himself out to be - the Christ, the promised Messiah of God, who had taken on the

form of a servant in order to bear the sins of the whole world - the Jews' sins, Pilate's sins, Judas and Peter's sins, your sins. Jesus ought to die because love is the perfect fulfillment of the Law and what greater love could there be than to die for those who hate you in order to save them?

Thus, in its blind hatred of the truth, the darkness actually destroyed itself and provided for the atoning sacrifice of the whole world. Though we now descend into darkness and it would seem that the darkness has triumphed, there remains a light. For though Christ died, though for three hours even the sun failed to give its light, Jesus' death was the final undoing of the darkness of sin. The promise of God remained, that the lord of darkness himself, the ancient serpent, would be crushed, even as Jesus of Nazareth hung lifeless on the cross and was laid lifeless into the tomb. The promise remains. The Holy One of God, as foretold, would not see decay though He most bitterly tasted death.

Darkness must have its hour, but it is only a short hour. The light will seem to be gone along with all hope. But the darkness cannot overcome the light. The truth will reign triumphant even as the dead Son of God hanging from His wooden throne, wearing His thorny crown, was actually crushing His enemies that He might reign victorious over sin and death. That is the answer to Pilate's question. God dead on a cross having suffered the whole terrible price of our sin - that is Truth. The price was more than sufficient. Our debt was paid - all of it. The Law which once condemned us can do so no more. Yes, as the true and promised Messiah and the true and obedient Son, Jesus must die. The Law demands it if He who knew no sin would dare to become sin for us. We ought to die for our sin but the true Passover Lamb of God has already done that. He died, once for all - for you. And the fruit of that death is life. Life for repentant sinners. Life for all who eat His holy Flesh and drink His holy Blood in faith, believing that these have been given for you for the forgiveness of your sins.

Ponder this night this greatest of all mysteries - that the Lord of Life has suffered death that we who deserve nothing but death are given the free gift of life. May the Holy Spirit bless our meditation that we return with hastened steps to feast again on the true and eternal Passover - the Holy Communion of Christ's Body and Blood.

In the Name of +Jesus

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keeps your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.