

Many members. One body united in Christ.

Good Friday

St. John 18:1-19:42

3 April, Anno Domini 2026

Beloved family of the Most High God once covered in the shame of your sin, now covered in the Blood of God's Son,

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

In chapter 12 of his letter to the Roman Christians, St. Paul issues this warning "For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly that he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned." (Rom. 12:3) But this is exactly what sinners do best, we convince ourselves that we have a better understanding than everyone else, that no one has anything they can teach us, that everyone needs to benefit from our wisdom, and that without us everything would fall apart. Our sin has so blinded us that we no longer simply want to be like God, we think we are and that we have even surpassed God's wisdom and understanding.

Today, as we gather to behold the life-giving cross upon which hung the salvation of the world, we consider the last of the seven deadly sins - pride. Arguably, pride is both the head and root of all the deadly sins. It is pride that sets us against God, imagining that we know better what is good and what is evil, what is love, what is truth. Pride obsesses over being or becoming "better" either in our own eyes or the eyes of others. Pride believes that it has a much greater impact on the world and even the universe than it actually has. Pride is like a stubborn mule that can't be taught. It has opinions on everything (that are always right, of course) and can't stand the thought of anyone knowing that it doesn't.

As is the case with the other deadly sins, pride is disordered love. Gluttony is a disordered love of especially eating and drinking. Greed is a disordered love of wealth and goods. Lust is a disordered love of sex. Pride, then, is a disordered love of myself - my wisdom, my abilities, my health, my looks, my importance, my good works, my suffering. Our Old Adam is so prideful and stupid that sometimes it actually puffs itself up over the depth of its sin, imagining that because it is so much worse than others, it is the only one who can really understand and appreciate God's grace and mercy. Only sinners like us could find a way to boast in how bad we are.

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And while we might not wrestle as deeply with some of the other sins as those around us, everyone last one of us is in a constant battle with his own pride. We want praise and reward for everything we do, even if all we have done is our duty. We demand that our feelings and emotions be acknowledged and coddled. We are appalled at the notion of being held accountable for our words and deeds while we scrutinize and chastise every syllable and step of our neighbor.

Every sin is a sin of pride. Every sin declares that “I alone will be the arbiter of right and wrong, good and evil. Because I am I will make the rules and I will break them as I see fit. I will make God in my own image, after my own likeness. I will determine what is reasonable for God to say and do. I will decide whether or not God’s commandments apply to me. I alone have the wisdom to be judge, jury, and executioner of all around me. All, even God, must humble Himself before what I think, how I feel, and what I want.” Our pride is finally idolatry because by it we place ourselves at the center of everything as though we are the creators and orderers of creation.

But God is not impressed. He does not indulge our pride. He breaks it. He scatters the proud in the imaginations of their hearts. He takes everything that we foolishly imagine makes us great and crushes it all under His feet as they are fastened to the cross with nails. “When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of glory died, my richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride.” The naked, crushed, bruised, and bloody Body of God reveals just how foolish and evil our pride truly is. Is your love so pure that you would go to the electric chair for the man who murdered your family while he continued to boast about it? Are you so merciful that you would quietly endure mockery and lies being hurled at you and forgive those who rejoiced with every lash of the scourge, who wagged their heads at you, and who rejoiced in your abject humiliation? We know that we wouldn’t. We bristle and curse when someone has the audacity to inconvenience us by getting sick or getting into an accident on the highway.

This is why so many avoid Good Friday and are offended by crucifixes. That God - good, glorious, all-powerful God - would willingly allow such things to be done to Him, worse, that it was the Father’s will to crush Jesus and that Jesus gladly, boldly, and confidently marched to Jerusalem and Golgotha of His own will is a crushing blow to our pride. What could be more contrary to everything that we scramble to attain for ourselves in this world than for the wretchedness of the cross to be the very hour of Jesus’ highest glory and the only way in which we can be saved? Everything that the world and our flesh praise as good and glorious - wealth, success, power, pleasure, comfort, fun, the praises of men - all of it God

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unmasks as worthless trash that only a fool seeking his own destruction would chase after. If the Son of Man lifted up on a cross to die is true glory, then what does that mean for me? “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.” (Matt. 16:24-25)

Pride hates the cross because the cross is antithetical to pride. The cross is death. The cross is suffering. Jesus’ cross is sacrifice and selflessness. The cross is seeking the glory of God and His will rather than our own. The cross is self-denial, the very thing our flesh can’t stand to do. The cross definitively declares that we are evil when we are fighting desperately to believe and prove that we are good.

God is good. That is what the cross says. The cross says that God is righteous because He gave His only begotten Son into death so that whosoever trusts that Jesus’ death has atoned for their sin, should not perish as they deserve but have everlasting life. The cross rips away the delusion that I have anything good upon which to stand before God’s throne. My works, my love, my piety - what are they? If they were of any value against the weight of our guilt, then Jesus would not have gone to the cross. If we were even a tenth of the good of what our pride wants us to believe we are, then Moses and the two tablets of stone would have been all we needed.

But they weren’t. Those commandments reveal what the cross confirms - the pride of our hearts has driven us away from God right into arms of the master of all pride, Lucifer himself. Seeking our own will we only carry out his, that of our eternal destruction. He who was not content to be less than man and foolishly sought to cast down God from His throne, has drawn us into his sin. Like the devil, we are never content to be God’s creatures, to submit ourselves to His Word and will. We want to be and have more. We think that being like God means being an arrogant jerk who can simply do whatever He wants and make everyone bend to His desires and serve him. But the devil is a liar and that is not who God is.

Behold! That is God! Hated. Betrayed. Blasphemed. Spit upon. Flogged. Mocked. Nailed to a cross. Naked. Crowned with thorns. Silent before His accusers. Forgiving His murderers. Taking the place of murderers and insurrectionists. Granting eternal life to thieves. All for us. All because unless He did, we would be lost to eternal judgment forever. Shame on us for thinking that we are something when we are nothing, for puffing out our chest, for demanding our rights, for holding our grudges, for seeking after praise. Our boasting is not good. It is evil.

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Repent. Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God and run to where His mercy and forgiveness can be found. Insist that your pastor hear your confession and pronounce Jesus' forgiveness of all your sins of pride because that is exactly why Jesus endured the agony that was poured out on His body and His soul. He wanted to take it away from you no matter what it cost Him.

Your prideful Old Adam was plunged under the waters of Holy Baptism where Christ drowned him with all of his chasing after vainglory and his inflated sense of self. In his place a new man was given birth, a man being conformed to the image of that one, a man who lays down His life for sheep who love to wander, a man who loves His neighbor even when His neighbor hates Him, a man who despises what the world loves because His glory is to do the will of His Father.

And because that new man has risen in you, you are not ashamed to look at Jesus on the cross. You glory in it because it is that man, despised and rejected by man, precisely in His hanging there dying, who shows forth the love and mercy of God for you. The deadly pride which flees from the cross, turns away from it in shame and embarrassment, tries to ignore it, is dead. In its place humility and faith embrace the crucified Jesus, praise and celebrate His atoning death, and gladly take up their own crosses, despising their shame because faith knows that crosses that come from Jesus are saving crosses. Faith knows that crosses sent by Jesus end in resurrection and life.

Do not think more highly of yourselves than you ought. Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God and think highly of Him who laid aside His glory and humbled Himself to the point of death for your salvation. Nothing is more glorious or worthy of praise. Nothing is more beautiful or comforting than the Jesus of Good Friday because that Jesus is also the Jesus of Easter who lives and who sits this day this hour on His glorious throne. And that same Jesus, crucified, risen, and ascended, this hour humbles Himself to be present under bread and wine, bestowing upon us His eternal life, the fruits of His blessed cross.

God grant that Jesus Christ and Him crucified be our greatest and only glory.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

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