

FOURTH MIDWEEK LENTEN SERVICE March 22, 2006

St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI

HE WAS CROWNED SO THAT WE MIGHT RECEIVE A CROWN

Mark 15:16-20

Abu Greb. When those words are spoken, what do you think of? They may not remind you of anything. However, with the third anniversary of the beginning of the war in Iraq, those words might mean something to you. Abu Greb is a prison in Iraq. It is a prison where Iraqi soldiers were humiliated and disgraced by their captors, the US army. We have seen pictures and read accounts of what was done to these men who had been captured during the invasion of Iraq. The world was outraged and many citizens of our country were shocked by the humiliation that our soldiers put their captives through.

Our reading for today focuses on another humiliation and mockery done by soldiers. This took place on a Friday morning about 1,973 years ago. The Roman governor of Palestine, Pontius Pilate, had tried to release Jesus. He had him beaten bloody publicly by his soldiers thinking that would satisfy the people's thirst for blood. He tried to have the people choose between a known murderer and insurrectionist over against Jesus, a popular teacher of the people. The people demanded that the murderer be released and that Jesus be crucified. There was nothing left for Pilate to do but issue the order for Jesus to be executed. Pilate's soldiers then took Jesus out of the public eye and into the palace of the governor. Here as in the prison at Abu Greb, we are told what sport the soldiers had with Jesus.

Matthew tells us that, "The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers." (v. 16) That could have been up to 600 soldiers because that is the number that usually was in a company or cohort of a legion. That's quite a few soldiers. They put a purple robe on him. Then they took and wove a thorny crown and put it on Jesus' head. Then they greeted him crying out, "Hail, King of the Jews!" (v. 18b) Remember Jesus had already lost a great deal of blood from his whipping and was in great pain and physically weakened. Then they took sticks and began to strike Jesus on the head. They then spit on him. They bended their knees and worshiped him. In all this they were mocking Jesus and making fun of him. What kind of king was this? These soldiers thought this was a big joke. They then stripped the purple robe off of Jesus and put his own clothes back on him and took him out to be crucified.

As you and I remember this event today we focus on the fact that **JESUS WAS CROWNED SO THAT YOU AND I MIGHT RECEIVE A CROWN.**

When we think of a king, we usually think of someone who wears a crown made of gold and studded with many precious jewels. He usually is wearing the best and finest of robes. A king is someone who has great power and authority. He usually has thousands of soldiers at his command. He is someone who commands respect, obedience and reverence. He is someone who is in charge and everyone knows it.

Governor Pilate had asked Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?" (Mark 15:2a) Jesus answered him, "Yes, it is as you say." (Mark 15:2b) Here is the King of the Jews and look how he is being treated. If you and I had seen Jesus in the governor's palace, we would never recognize this man as someone who was a king. This scene was a poor man beaten bloody being mocked by hundreds of soldiers. They dressed him in some old purple robe that they had found. They wove together a thorny branch in the

shape of a wreath and jammed it on Jesus' head. They began shouting at him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" That must have been quite a sight hundreds and hundreds of soldiers chanting, "Hail, King of the Jews!" Then they took sticks and kept on beating him on the head. Then they spit on him. How degrading and filthy to have hundreds of soldiers spitting on you. Then they went down on their knees and worshiped him as if he was a great and mighty King. In all this they were making fun of Jesus. Some king you are. Where are your armies? What kind of power do you have?

Why did our Lord go through such mockery and scorn? He did it for you and me. He did it to fulfill the prophecy, "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 53:3) This is what you and I should receive for our sins. This is what we deserve for failing to be perfect and holy as God demands of us. Yet Jesus took our place and endured the mockery, scorn and ridicule that we deserve. Then the soldiers took him out so that they might finish the job and crucify him.

All this happened to Jesus so that you and I one day might receive a crown – not a crown of thorns, but a crown of righteousness. As the Apostle Paul wrote as he faced his own death, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing." (2 Timothy 4:7-8) In Paul's day when a runner finished a race, he received a crown, a wreath made not of thorns, but of greens. This crown was given to the winner.

Such a crown you and I will receive. Why? Do we receive this crown because we have worked so hard and been so faithful? No! We receive this crown only because Jesus Christ worked so hard and was perfectly faithful for us. Jesus was crowned with thorns so that we might receive the crown of everlasting life in heaven. As Jesus says in the book of Revelation, "Be faithful even to the point of death and I will give you the crown of life." (Revelation 2:10)

As you and I recall the crown of thorns jammed on our Savior's head by those Roman soldiers, we thank God that Jesus was crowned for us so that we might receive the crown of eternal life.

Amen.