

God's Brutal Solution to Our Brutality
Sermon based on Isaiah 53:4-6
Saint Mark's, Watertown, WI
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March 21, 2008

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Amen.

God's Word for our special consideration this afternoon is Isaiah, chapter fifty-three, verses four through six. Would you read it with me? Referring to Jesus:

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

This is God's Spirit-inspired Word of Jesus Christ.

Part One: The Brutal Truth about Us

Dear fellow observers of the death of Jesus:

It's been a brutal winter, hasn't it? For some fairly long stretches, below-zero weather, with wind chills double digits below zero—that was normal. For some really long stretches, we didn't see temperatures above freezing at all. And it's still not warm, even though we have reached springtime. Then there was all that snow!—what, wasn't it six or seven feet altogether, and not far from a record?

It made for a brutal winter for sickness also. They say that the flu vaccine, for those who got it, only covered forty percent of the viruses that were out there. That one upper respiratory virus, with congestion and coughing and aches and pains—most of us had that at one time or another, and for a long time. And we weren't without our stomach viruses and pneumonias either.

And that tends to make the winter sort of sad, doesn't it? I mean: It's cold. It's snowy. You're sick. Everybody else is sick. In the news: the presidential candidates keep telling us what awful shape the nation is in, and how much worse it will get unless we elect them. The media insists we're slumping into a recession or toward a depression or maybe even planetary disintegration.

How did it get this bad? Well, a careful look at God's Word to us today connects very closely our *sicknesses* and *sadnesses* (in the first verse) to our *rebellions* and *perversions* (in the second verse). And it's true, isn't it? Until our first forefathers, Adam and Eve, rebelled against God, deciding to trust Satan instead..., until they took God's good plan for them and perversely crumpled it, by eating the fruit God had forbidden them to eat... —until then, there was no sickness or sadness: no virus, no bacterial infection, no strain, no pain, no stress, no boredom, no hurt feelings, no lack of love. Mankind's rebellion & perversion brought sickness, sadness, & death to this world.

And so that we don't think we can blame it on Adam and Eve, verse six reminds us: *We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way.* Each one of us has his own rebellious, perverted path. One of us dumb sheep thinks he can find his own way to God, and over the cliff we go. Another thinks he doesn't need the Word of the Lord, and we head remotely into the desert. Another thinks his plans, his pleasures, and his possessions are the all-important things in life, and we get caught in the thick undergrowth of a forest.

Isn't this where our Good Friday journey has to begin? The brutal truth is that we are in dire danger. We have tumbled down a cliff, and we are broken. We have journeyed into a desert, and we are dying of thirst. We have wandered deep into a forest, and we are threatened and scared. And the reason is our own brutality—the brutal way we've treated one another, and the brutal way we've treated God.

Part Two: God's Brutal Solution to Our Brutality

That's where our Good Friday journey has to start. But that's not where it ends. Instead, it ends with us looking up at Christ's cross and seeing God's brutal solution to our brutality.

As Isaiah reports: *Surely he, Jesus, took up our infirmities*—kind of literally: *our sicknesses*. And Saint Matthew's Gospel, chapter eight, connects those words to Jesus' healing ministry. But it's at the cross that Jesus' healing ministry reached its culmination. Here on the cross, whatever everlasting virus, whatever eternal infection, whatever strain, whatever pain our sins merited forever—they all disappeared. Jesus suffered for it all. Therefore, there is coming a day for you that you will never suffer again.

Going on: And surely Jesus *carried our sorrows—our sadnesses*. Whatever everlasting stress, whatever eternal boredom, whatever hurt, whatever hate our sins so richly deserved—these have all disappeared. Jesus suffered for it all. Christ's crucifixion was God's brutal solution to our brutality.

Yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. Ingrates that we were, by nature we thought Jesus deserved what he was getting for his crimes. Nevertheless, he still loved us so, and toughed it out on the cross on our behalf.

But he was pierced for our transgressions. As you look at the cross: Do you hear the loud ring of the metal spike? Do you hear the shriek of pain? Do you see the blood gush? Do you see the agony on Jesus' face? – You'll never have to go through that, although you deserve it. He suffered that for you.

And again: *He was crushed for our iniquities.* Do you hear his strain to breathe? Do you see him pushing himself up for oxygen? More than that, do you feel the darkness into which God plunged the world and the inner darkness Christ is enduring? – All of that will never happen to you. Jesus went through all of that for you.

The punishment that brought us peace was upon him. How many lashes with the whip have your dirty thoughts deserved? How many floggings have your words merited? How many chunks of skin should be ripped off your torso for the deeds you've done? – You'll never endure that punishment. In fact, you'll receive a reward. Jesus won that reward for you.

And by his wounds we are healed. Someday you will wake up to Jesus like a well-rested soul who enjoyed a very good meal the night before. You'll stretch, you'll take a deep breath, the space will smell good, light will flood your room, and you'll think, "All my pain is gone." This is what Christ on the cross has meant to you.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him, on Jesus, the iniquity – the crookedness, the perversion – of us all.

I mean: What was your worst sin? Have you destroyed someone's reputation? Did you do some serious property damage, although nobody found out about it? Have you sinned sexually—and if anybody knew it, you would crawl in a hole and die? Did you harm, or maybe even finally really murder, somebody? Have you broken a major law of the land big time? Or are you an idolater? Have you failed until now to trust in

Jesus? Or have you put Jesus into his little cubby hole in your life and told Jesus to come out only when you call for him? That's *perversion*, all right. It's *rebellion*.

But it's also all gone. Jesus accepted responsibility for those sins. Jesus accepted those sins upon himself, as if he himself had really done them. Jesus got punished for those crimes of yours. It's said and done. In fact, it's so said and done that it happened two thousand years ago already. For Jesus' sake, God has made himself unaware that you are anything but obedient to him. *The Lord has laid on Jesus the iniquity of us all.*

So, it has been a brutal winter—this lifetime of sickness and sadness and sin and death. But springtime is coming. From the dead tree of Christ's cross have sprung some ever-living blessings: the disappearance of your sins and a right standing in God's sight. From Christ's cross must also spring a summertime of eternal life with your Heavenly Father.

The cross, then, is the brutal way God dealt with our brutality. And so, to us God's kindness never shone so brightly as from the cross of Jesus. Count on it as Christ's guarantee of your everlasting happiness. Amen.

As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation. Amen.