

Draw Near: Us 1 Peter 2:19-25

INTRODUCTION

As you know, throughout this Lenten season we have been focused on the invitation of Jesus to DRAW NEAR to the cross. Two verses of Scripture have guided our journey. The first is our theme verse:

Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. (James 4:8)

The second more specifically focuses our attention on the moment of the crucifixion.

(Jesus speaking) And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. (John 12:32-33)

During our Thursday evening services, and again yesterday on Maundy Thursday, we met several people who were there at the cross on that very first Good Friday.

- The women
- The beloved disciple John
- Two Pharisees, named Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus
- Two thieves
- The soldiers
- And yesterday, a man named Simon of Cyrene

The characters in today's sermon do not appear in the biblical text, but the entire focus of this day is about them. These characters were not even alive on that day when Jesus was crucified, yet Good Friday happened because of them.

Who are these mysterious people? It's us. You and me. We are the reason Jesus was crucified.

Our text today says it rather simply:

"He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness ... (1 Peter 2:24)

Our sins. Yours. Mine. It says the same thing in that beautiful passage we read at the conclusion of yesterday's service:

But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed. (Isaiah 53:5)

This makes me squirm. I don't like to squirm. But Good Friday forces me to address a thought I don't like to think. The most startling realization on a Good Friday is this very truth.

It was for me he died. I am the reason Good Friday had to happen.

I don't like to think of myself as a bad person. I am certainly not someone who is so bad that Jesus needed to die!

- I know the world has bad people in it. You don't need to convince me of that. I watch the news.
- Think about the headlines:
 - Vladimir Putin
 - Mass shooter in Sacramento
 - A teen gunned down on S. Yellow Springs Street.
 - A murder outside of our own Springfield Soup Kitchen.
- But I am nothing like those people... Am I?

I know the Bible says:

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. (1 John 1:8)

I don't claim to be sinless. I know I sin. But I only commit "nice" sins. Respectable sins. If I told you my sins, you would say "Oh, that's not too bad. It could be worse."

Does that script sound familiar? Have you used it before?

The fact that you and I can so quickly and easily use that script is proof that we have not drawn near to the cross.

This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God. (John 3:19-21)

When we draw near to the cross, we discover that God hates our respectable sins just as much as He hates those committed by the wicked people of the world. To them, there is no difference.

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

Let me explain it this way. Suppose you had committed a serious crime and were brought before a judge for sentencing. There was no question about your guilt; you knew you had committed the crime, and you knew you deserved the sentence the judge was about to hand down. You had broken the law; the penalty had to be paid –

and you were the one who had to pay it. Then the judge pronounced the sentence, and the deputies started to take you away to jail.

But then, suppose the judge suddenly ordered them to stop, stepped down from his bench and announced that he was going to take your place! You deserved to go to prison – but he was going instead! In other words, he was innocent but was willing to take upon himself the penalty that the law demanded for your crime – the penalty you should have paid.

This is what Jesus Christ has done for us. We deserve to die and be separated from God forever because of our sins – but Christ took our place. By His death on the cross He paid the price for our sins – fully and completely. In other words, He died for us; He died in our place. Now all we have to do is accept His forgiveness, by trusting Him alone for our salvation.

APPLICATION

As this service concludes you are going to be given the opportunity to live out the truth of this day. I will invite you to come forward ... to DRAW NEAR to the cross. If you choose, you may hammer a nail into the cross. Perhaps the nail you have been carrying during this Lenten season. Even if you choose not to hammer a nail, DRAW NEAR and spend a few moments reflecting on the significance of this day.

Let us pray:

Amen.