**Matthew 27:11-66 (ESV)**

**“Mindful Of His Sacrifice”**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. If anyone ever wants to know how God looks at mission work. We only need turn to Holy Week to see it. Jesus already has done it all for a sinful world. Palm Sunday begins this procession of what truly is the mission. It comes not with words from Christians of “alleluia” because we are still in Lent. Instead, we lift up shouts of “Hosanna” or “God save us” for Jesus takes this theme of “God saving” to the cross. The Passion of Jesus read today clears up any confusion a person can have. It narrows down the focus on the many finally to be just about one.

Of course, one is not an easy number unlike other numbers. When Adam was the only one in the Garden God said, “It is not good that man should be alone.” When Israel became a nation, God made sure there were twelve tribes and not just one. When Jesus sent out the seventy-two ahead of Him, each did not go on their own but went out two by two. Even natural man is this world knows what number is not easy. The popular song by Third Dog Night sums it, “One is the loneliest number.” Yet, Holy Week ends up taking away all the numbers, but one. We who live in a culture blessed with so many options and choices. Face God’s mission for salvation that drives everyone to His one and only Son. One is NOT the loneliest number when that One is Jesus on the cross.

There is One who makes the cross more than a cross. It had happened thousands of times before. Crucifixions were a dime a dozen to the Romans. How many had Pontius Pilate done in the past? There was nothing special about the cross. However, what stood out this time was Jesus. There were no grounds for his crucifixion. Yet, to save face, to preserve the system, Pilate allowed it when he could have said, “no.” The crowd mockingly declared, “His blood be on us and our children.” Yet, Pilate tried to wash his hands of the whole ordeal all together. The injustice was just too much for this governor of Rome. A law-abiding man was trying to evade the guilt of his own sin. He missed how Jesus took responsibility even to save one such as Pilate.

The cross does not make Jesus. Jesus makes the cross. Have you ever noticed how little the Gospels give details on the crucifixion? Plenty of historical records tell us about that fatal practice. What matters in the Gospels is Jesus who dies as the sacrifice. The character of Christ makes all the difference. Isaiah declared about Him, “The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I turned not backward. I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting.” Instead of overlooking our guilt of sin, pushing it on others to feel better, or washing hands of the mess. Jesus responsibly suffers on the cross proving no sinner needs to make their own defense.

There is One who also makes the cross glorious beyond what any can see in this life. An innocent bystander, Simon of Cyrene, was dragged into this parade of death to Golgotha. The New Testament notes him saying nothing while having to bear the cross of Jesus. He had front row seats in the procession of God’s salvation, but Simon saw it differently. Unlike the disciples who fled away in fear at what they saw. There was no option for escape, no way to flee from the pain or the shame. He could only follow Jesus and not his own self-interests. God was doing His mission work of proclaiming the glory hidden in the cross.

When we were baptized into Jesus His glorious cross came upon our lives and remains until death. You did not choose the cross the cross chose you. It can fall upon us unexpectedly just like Simon. Christianity is far from something of self-improvement. Jesus said, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34). This following leads us to confess our shortsighted glories that go against the crucified Lord of glory. God answers the question, “Who cares about life, suffering, problems, shame, or sadness?” Here is the truth and love Simon of Cyrene saw in carrying the cross of God. St. Paul tells us, “And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

There is One who also makes the cross the confession of His Name. The death of Jesus spoke volumes to those who saw all kinds of death. The centurion and others with him knew how death by crucifixions went. Yet, the Roman soldiers were not numb to the passing away of Jesus. Men die alone and life goes on, but creation gave surprising signs to this one on the cross. “…They were filled with awe and said, ‘Truly this was the Son of God!” Jesus did in death what none other has done or will ever do again. St. Paul verifies it, “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (Colossians 1:19-20).

The not so peaceful death of Christ is now life to a not so peaceful world of dying sinners. This is the Good News grounded on forgiveness by Jesus’ death and resurrection for all. Lutheran missions seeks to make the most of what God has given in His Son. As our Synod President states, “Faith is not created by human enthusiasm, crusades for social justice or strategic planning. Faith come through the Word of the cross” (Journal of Lutheran Mission March 15, 64). Only from the cross do the Word and Sacrament have an answer for sinners. Only by the cross does Christ give the gift of faith in Him. Only in the cross, death quakes so by dying with Jesus we live forever. One is NOT the loneliest number when that One is Jesus on the cross. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.