

Good Friday

Sermon Preached by the Rev. Robert A. Arbogast

Celebration Fellowship, Ionia, Michigan

March 26 & 27, 2018

Scripture

*Christ has appeared once for all
at the culmination of the ages
to do away with sin
by the sacrifice of himself.*

Hebrews 9:26

Sermon

A couple weekends ago, Jan & I spent half a day raking leaves. We have trees all around our house. That means lots of leaves and lots of raking. And the thing about raking is, you can't do it just once. You have to rake again and again. Because the leaves keep falling. So dealing with leaves is almost endless.

The letter to the Hebrews says the same thing about sins. It says dealing with sins was endless, because sin itself never let go. That's why God established the Temple. And that's why the Temple priests offered sacrifices every day.

That's also why those priests had great job security. Because sins kept littering the holy ground under the feet of God's chosen people. Sins were like leaves falling from an oak tree, over and over again. That's why the work of the Temple priests was never finished.

But all that changed on Good Friday. On Good Friday, Jesus finished the job. He did it once, and he did it completely. Here's how Hebrews puts it: Christ "has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Hebrews 9:26).

Christ has appeared. Once for all. At the culmination of the ages. To do away with sin. By the sacrifice of himself. Here's what that adds up to: Jesus is our Great High Priest. And he is a better priest than all the sons of Aaron. In fact, Jesus is superior in every way.

On Good Friday, we remember the sacrificial death of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. On Good Friday, we remember what the Romans tried to do. But more than anything, on Good Friday we remember what Jesus himself succeeded in doing.

The Romans had a goal on Good Friday. They wanted to show that Jesus was inferior in every way. They wanted all the world to see Jesus as hopeless and helpless and powerless. So they stripped him naked, and they pinned him to a cross, like an insect on display in a museum of natural history. And they pinned a label above him to identify his species. It said, "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."

It was all mockery. All of it was Rome's way of saying that Jesus was inferior, that Jesus was an inferior human being from an inferior people. All of it was Rome's way of saying that Jesus was no king at all! Or it was Rome's way of counting Jesus as a king only to count him out.

The Gospel is about a great struggle between competing kingdoms. In that struggle, only one kingdom will emerge victorious, the Kingdom of God. And in the end, "all the kingdoms of this world will become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Revelation 11:15).

Now Rome, of course, tried to stop that from happening. That's what every human kingdom does. Always and forever, we resist the Kingdom of God. That's what sin is. Sin is the endless human tendency to say, "We're in charge around here." But in fact, we are not in charge around here. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to [Jesus]" (Matthew 28:18). He is "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Revelation 19:16).

So Rome had a goal on Good Friday, a selfish goal. Rome cared only about Rome, about Rome's power, about Rome's domination of the world. And Rome would crush anything and anyone who got in the way.

But Jesus had a goal of his own on Good Friday. Remember, Jesus said, "No one takes my life from me. I lay it down willingly" (John 10:18). So despite appearances, never imagine for a moment that Jesus is a mere victim. No; Jesus is Lord, even on the cross, especially on the cross!

Jesus is Lord, and he had a goal of his own on Good Friday. Listen to Hebrews 9:26 again. Christ "has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself." Now, I want to say a few things about each part of that sentence.

Christ "has appeared once for all." The Romans wanted to show that Jesus was inferior in every way. But the letter to the Hebrews shows that he is superior in every way. He is certainly superior to the Temple priests of the Old Testament. Every year, the High Priest had to appear in the holy of holies of the Temple. He had to appear there every

year to deal with the sins of the people by the blood of a sacrifice. But when Christ appears, it's one and done. Jesus never has to repeat what he did on Good Friday.

Christ "has appeared at the culmination of the ages." Now, we human beings have passed through the stone age to the bronze age to the iron age. More recently we have passed through the industrial age to the information age to the digital age. God, on the other hand, does not age. For endless years, God is the same. Yet, Jesus came "at the culmination of the ages."

It was the culmination of the ages, because every age and every moment was moving toward Good Friday. It was the culmination of the ages, because Jesus is the climax and the end point of all history. Everything was made through Jesus Christ and for him. Everything holds together in him. And everything follows from him, everything follows from Good Friday. Good Friday is the day that changes everything.

Christ "has appeared to do away with sin." This is the big one! And notice what it doesn't say. It doesn't say Christ has appeared "to forgive sins." Now, of course, Jesus did that. And we have forgiveness of sins through his blood. Absolutely.

But this verse in Hebrews 9 is saying something different. It's saying something bigger. It's saying that Jesus has set sin aside. That Jesus has robbed sin of its power. That sin as an enslaving force has been dealt a death blow.

You know all that stuff that Rome wanted to do to Jesus? To cast him aside? To snuff him out? To reduce him to powerlessness and to nothing? All that stuff is what Jesus has done to sin!

You see, Good Friday means the age of sin is over. Never mind the iron age or the digital age. The longest human age, the age that started as close to the beginning as we could ever imagine, that age is over. Because Jesus has pulled the teeth of sin.

That's why Scripture can say, "Sin shall no longer be your master" (Romans 6:14). That's why Scripture can say, "You used to walk in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1-2). That's why Scripture can say, "You died to sin" (Romans 6:2). And that's why Good Friday is so good. We used to be slaves to sin. But sin is not our master any more, because of Jesus Christ! Thanks be to God!

Here's the last part of the sentence. *Christ "appeared to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself."* Now, Jesus was the perfect sacrifice—but not just because he was spotless and blameless, and not just because he was a willing sacrifice.

No; besides all that, Jesus was the perfect sacrifice, because he was the complete sacrifice. Because he was the “one and done” sacrifice. Because Jesus is enough and more than enough. Nothing else is needed besides Jesus. There’s nothing instead of Jesus that can save the world. And there’s nothing along with Jesus that can save the world. It’s only Jesus, and it’s Jesus alone. What a Savior!

Good Friday is good because that day belonged to Jesus Christ. The Romans had their own plans for that day. But the day belonged to Jesus Christ. And that day still belongs to Jesus Christ. And that day will always belong to Jesus Christ. Because on that day, “at the culmination of the ages,” Christ “appeared once for all to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.”

✠

Glory and thanks be to God:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

✠