

MESSAGE - Were You There – When Jesus Took Your Place?

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Rev. Lisa Kruse-Safford

SCRIPTURE Isaiah 53:1-7

Who has believed our message

and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

² He grew up before him like a tender shoot,
and like a root out of dry ground.

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

³ He was despised and rejected by mankind,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.

Like one from whom people hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

⁴ Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.

⁵ 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.

⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

⁷ He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

SCRIPTURE 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:^[a] The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God

were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin^[b] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

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Were you There?

The Good Friday song....

African-American spiritual....

"folk" music most likely developed in the fields

Sung with a call out

It was first published in 1899 and found its way into all kinds of hymnals, including the UMH #288

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?....

It poses the topic that has left a lot of people wondering through the ages:

Why did Jesus have to die?

Why did he die in such a horrible way?

What does it all mean?

If you've ever asked any of those questions, you're not the first. People have been doing that since it all happened.

I have a feeling that even before the resurrection appearances when the disciples were all gathered together in the upper room with the door shut they were asking, "why? and what for?"

Over these weeks of Lent, we're going to take a look at some the ways the cross of Jesus has come to be understood. The first one reminds me of something my mother used to say to me when I was growing up and what I've said to my kids as they were growing....

When I had friend problems

Boy problems

Worries and hurts

Sickness...

"I wish I could go through this instead of you."

I wish you didn't have to suffer this.

If I could take it away by going through it instead of you, I would!

Of course, this example only goes so far:

- 1) Because my mother couldn't take my place; and I couldn't take my kids pain away and suffer their pain in their place.
- 2) Plus – going through stuff like that forms you and makes you more resilient and stronger.
- 3) There wasn't something my kids had necessarily done wrong that they were experiencing the repercussions of.

But not so when it comes to sin.

We've been talking about sin these last couple of weeks, coming to understand what it is

Not to make us end up just feeling bad  
But to understand that sin leads to repercussions that we suffer through as a community and in relationship with God.

And to understand our need for God and God's love for us ... just like my mother's words and then my words indicated.

*I love you so much, I would take your place.*

Which *is* exactly one way we can understand what is happening on the cross.

***Because there's something about sin that we just cannot heal, correct, or take away the repercussions of on our own.***

Our own efforts would not measure up...those efforts would be steeped in sin themselves.

***And there's something about sin that we cannot suffer the total consequences of and survive in any way.***

Scripture says that the wages of sin is death...

Complete separation from God...

This is based in the understanding that God is holy and for God ignore our sinfulness would simply not be in line with God's character.

A chasm you cannot bridge...

So God makes a way for the people.....

Which makes us look back to the ancient Israelites'....

God gave them rituals to perform which would help them to understand and to claim the redeeming love of God.

These rituals were called "atoning sacrifices"

Leviticus 16 gives a detailed account of the ritual

Sacrifice of a goat – which atones for the people's sins

Scapegoat – which is assigned the sins of the people and sent away

A wiping of the slate/cleansing of the stain of sin

And a sending away of the sin

The animals were "substitutions" for the people themselves.

The yearly ritual brought together

- The awareness of the community's sin and their need for redemption
- And the assurance that God was there giving them what they needed and could not do for themselves.

And those rituals were important to the community –

- Until there came a time when they could not perform them....namely when the temple had been destroyed and they were in exile and suffering themselves.
- But the prophet Isaiah helped them to see that there was still the work of "substitutionary" atonement happening... the mysterious "he" in chapter 53

In Jesus' death, people came to understand Jesus is that "he"

suffering the consequence on our behalf

Healing/taking away sin.

Because he is able to do what we cannot do.

As we read in 2 Corinthians:

*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us,*

So why the cross of Jesus?

God is speaking in the religious language the people already knew....while going the extra mile to make the sacrifice himself...which for the first time, makes the sacrifice perfect because it is done through the perfect human: Jesus.

*And all so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

God's intention is to set all things right

And what a gift that is!

So Were you There – when Jesus took your place?

Friends - you "are there" when you have an awareness of your need/your guilt/your sin that nothing you can do can change....

And you accept that Jesus has made a mother's statement real: "I wish I could take it on myself so you don't have to go through it yourself."

#### PRAYER OF CONFESSION

L: Let us humble ourselves as we come before the Lord in confession.

**C: Holy God, we confess that we like to think of ourselves as independent and able to meet our own needs. We sometimes fool ourselves into thinking that we can take care of the business of our own forgiveness and salvation. Forgive us and help us to realize that upon the cross of Christ, you do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Thus may we come to you with deep gratitude. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. Amen.**

L: Hear the good news: Christ died for us while we were yet sinners. This proves God's love for us. In the name of Jesus Christ you are forgiven.

**C: In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.**