



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

1611 E Main St., Watertown, WI 53094

(920)261-2570

A Stephen Ministry Congregation

www.goodshepherdwi.org

GOOD FRIDAY

April 14, 2017

“With His Stripes We Are Healed”

(Is. 53:5)

Rev. David K. Groth

“But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed” (Is. 53:5).

“Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him” (Jn. 19:1).

**Every day, everywhere, by everyone...
sharing the grace of the Good Shepherd.**

Collect: Almighty God, graciously behold this Your family for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed and delivered into the hands of sinful men to suffer death upon the cross; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
Amen

In Deuteronomy 25, it says if a man is found guilty of a crime that deserves punishment, “the judge shall cause him to lie down and be flogged with a number of stripes in proportion to his offense” (v. 2). It goes on to say no more than forty stripes may be administered, (quote) “lest your brother be degraded in your sight.” It was meant to protect the dignity and humanity of the one being punished. He’s still a human being, after all, a person made in God’s own image. It was also meant, I think, to protect the dignity and humanity of the one administering the punishment, lest he become numb to the suffering he’s inflicting, or even starts taking pleasure in it. (So far we’ve fallen that the Bible has to account for this well documented tendency in the human condition.)

So the Jews had restrictions. No such limits existed for the Romans. Roman floggings were so brutal that sometimes the victim died from the flogging alone.

In the Roman Empire thousands were crucified and crucifixion was always preceded by severe flogging. It was part of the package, and it made the sentence of crucifixion even more terrifying. This combination was the strongest deterrent to crime the Romans could think of.

The Romans used a whip made of several strips of leather. It was called a flagrum, and attached at various intervals in the leather were pieces of metal (usually lead or iron). These functioned to grip the flesh and remove pieces of it from the victim. It left behind deep lacerations, torn flesh, exposed muscles, nerves and even bones, an oozing mass of mutilated, quivering flesh. The Centurion in charge was supposed to order a halt to the flogging when it was

clear the victim was near death. After all, there's no point of crucifying a guy who's already dead. Sometimes the Centurion miscalculated. He would go too far and the criminal would die before they could put him on a cross.

This is the kind of treatment almighty God submitted himself to for us and for our salvation. "By his stripes we are healed." Isaiah lived seven hundred years before Christ, and yet this whole chapter so very clearly points to the flogging and crucifixion of Jesus.

In preparation for the seminary, I took Hebrew classes at UW-Madison. My Hebrew professor grew up Jewish, but became a Christian later in life. When he was baptized, his family disowned him. He was very kind, very bright, soft spoken, and sincere. He and his wife honored us when they came to our wedding. It was generous of them to do so.

He knew I was planning to go to the seminary after graduation, and in a private conversation, he told me "When you're visiting with a Jewish person and talking about religion, show them Isaiah 53 and ask, "If not Jesus, then who is this about?" "He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his stripes 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 . . . the LORD makes his life a guilt offering." If not Jesus, then who is this about?

It's so clearly about Jesus that years ago many scholars and skeptics assumed someone wrote this passage *after* Jesus lived and died, and then added it to the book of Isaiah later on to prop up the Jesus cult. That was a popular theory up until 1947 when a large and very well preserved ancient scroll was pulled out of a hidden cave found in the desolate mountains east of the Dead Sea. It turned out to be the Isaiah scroll. By every measure it was dated to about 125 BC, 125 years before Christ was born. And yet, it was all there, all 65 chapters of Isaiah, including chapter 53. Its discovery proved that chapter 53 was not added to Isaiah

some time after Christ. “Show them Isaiah 53 my professor said. If not Jesus, then who is this about?” If they say, “This is about the messiah for whom we are still waiting” then they are waiting for a messiah who will be flogged and pierced for our transgressions. “If not Jesus, then who?”

But why would Almighty God subject himself to this? Isaiah tells us: So that “by his stripes we are healed.”

We know Pilate’s heart really wasn’t in it. He didn’t want to see Jesus crucified. He thought a good flogging would suffice, and his soldiers gleefully carried it out. Isaiah 52:14 says, “his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness.” That’s what a Roman flogging will do to a man. That’s why, just after the flogging, when Pilate brings Jesus out before the crowd, he says, “Behold the man.” In other words, “look at what we’ve done to him. Isn’t it enough?”

For the religious authorities, it’s not enough. They want more. They want the ultimate. So they stir up the crowd to shout, “Crucify him!” The chief priests want to show this Jesus is just a man, and no more than a man. And they want to show by his suffering that he’s a fraud. Remember, in that culture, if you’re sick or suffering, it was assumed God was punishing you for something you’ve done. So getting Jesus on a cross would be incontestable evidence that he’s a sinner and a fraud whom God is punishing. There’s no surer way to discredit Jesus than for people to see him hanging dead on a cross.

The Romans always crucified people in a very public places, because it wasn’t just an execution. (There are more efficient ways of killing a man.) It was a deterrent, a message. This is what we’ll do to you if you don’t behave. By law they couldn’t crucify a man inside the city, so this took place just outside Jerusalem’s walls, near a major road leading into the city.

Think of all those pilgrims coming and going into Jerusalem at Passover. Hundreds must have walked past Golgotha. When they saw those three being crucified, and what the flogging had already done to them, I picture them

hurrying their steps, averting their eyes, maybe even taking a detour around Golgatha so they and their kids don't have to witness man's inhumanity to man, and hear the screaming and the cursing and the pleading. V. 3, "As one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised, and we esteemed him not."

This was Rome's way. It was God's way too, his plan all along. In Matthew 20, Jesus is preparing his disciples for what awaits him in Jerusalem. He tells them the religious authorities are going to arrest and condemn him and then "hand him over to the Gentiles [the Romans] to be flogged and crucified." "Flogged and crucified". He knows exactly what awaits him. "Flogged and crucified." It's remarkable that three words could carry the freight of so much suffering! He indeed was suffering for sin, but it was for our crimes, not his. Peter writes, "He himself bore **our** sins in his body on the tree" (1 Pet. 2:24). He was suffering an alien punishment, which *we ourselves* had earned. "He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed." That's why he had to suffer so cruel a death. A kind and gentle death would never have sufficed, because it's your sin and mine he's dying for.

This is the very heart of our faith.

2 Corinthians 5, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (v.21)

Romans 8, "God sent his Son to be a sin offering" (v. 3)

And one more from Galatians 3, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree'" (v.13).

"By his stripes we are healed." In the end, it becomes intensely personal. This passage has become an

important passage to my wife. I asked her about it the other day. “Of all passages in the Bible, why this one?”

Gail has been contending with cancer for ten years now. Cancer is doing what cancer does, and Gail is doing what she does, being a worker, a parent, a wife, a friend, a volunteer. Over these ten years, she has received many different kinds of chemotherapy. She uses one until it’s proven ineffective or unbearable. And then another is prescribed, and then another. There are hundreds available, you know. And CNBC reported there are 586 experimental cancer drugs in the pipeline right now, all in clinical trials (June 2, 2016).

So many different options! How can an oncologist keep up with them all?

We have grown to love and trust Dr. Eastman. He is a very good doctor and a very good man. Still, from our perspective it’s a little unnerving. How does Dr. Eastman know which chemotherapy would be best for Gail? Of the hundreds available, how can he know which one would be most effective for her particular kind of cancer?

And this is why Gail likes this passage: true healing won’t come from a chemotherapy. True healing won’t be found at the Johnson Creek Cancer Center, or at UW Hospital, or at Mayo or anywhere else. And true healing won’t come with any radiation, or with any essential oil rubbed into her skin. It won’t come with the asparagus diet, or by squeezing lemon just on everything you eat. True healing won’t come with a better attitude, or even with a stronger faith. True healing won’t come from us . . . only from him. “By his stripes we are healed.”

For Gail, for you, for me: “By his stripes we are healed.” Amen.

