



**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School**

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A Stephen Ministry Congregation

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**Good Friday**

**March 25, 2016**

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**“Sometimes It Causes Me to Tremble”**

*(John 19)*

Rev. David K. Groth

**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**

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When I think of the beautiful and good creation as it first was, as God intended it to be . . . sometimes it causes me to tremble. Eden. Paradise. Peace. Breathtaking beauty. Perfection. Truth. Creator and all creation finding joy in one another. Everything, at the molecular level and light years away, everything finely tuned to support life. “And behold, it was very good.”

The bird songs are wonderful this time of year, right? Imagine what they were like then. The colors today are vibrant. Surely they are pale and washed out when compared to Eden. The soil today is usually willing to grow things for us. In Eden, toss the seed down and get out of the way. In Eden, the thorns and thistles minded their boundaries. Happy trees handing out juicy fruit. Bees eager to give their honey away. The wolf dwelling *with* the lamb. The leopard napping with the goat. The infant playing near the hole of the cobra. Imagine being able to neglect your toddlers and let them wander unattended to explore God’s good creation, knowing they were perfectly safe.

Did Adam wrestle with the bears? Did Eve have a voice so beautiful as to make Adam weep? Naked and unashamed. Together without conflict. Apart without tension . . . or relief. One with the Lord and one another, in his image. Sometimes it causes me to tremble.

When I think of the beautiful and good creation *after* the rebellion, *after* the fall, sometimes it causes me to tremble. Man hiding from God, lying to God, naked and ashamed, desperately pointing fingers at one another, at the devil, even at God. Neither perfectly happy together, nor content apart. The earth still produces, but sometimes in a

measly sort of way. Women can still bear children, but it's painful now . . . and sinners beget sinners. Children and teens roll their eyes around their parents, may even think of them as morons. Hatred. Murder. Lust. Divorce. Envy. Slander. Sloth. All kinds of new words are necessary now. All kinds of new vocabulary, and surely many words were lost. Sometimes it causes me to tremble.

The beautiful, beautiful world of animals reduced to a food chain. Venom for killing, talons for seizing prey, incisors for tearing flesh, camouflage for hiding. Now, if a wolf comes close to a lamb, my bet is only one of them will walk away from it. Mosquitos bearing the Zika virus and dengue fever and malaria and the West Nile virus. Rats bearing the plague.

The weather too turns inhospitable – floods and fires, earthquakes and mudslides, polar vortex, drought, heat, tornados . . . they all have a way of killing. But so also do the acts of man: The carcinogenic haze of pollution. Masks over the mouth. Fracking. Clear cutting. Lead poisoning in the water. Fear and enmity everywhere between man and other creatures. Year after year I feed the birds in the back yard, provide them houses, do them no harm, wish them no harm. Yet when they see me coming, they flee as if their lives depended on it.

Fear and enmity everywhere between people too. Children are taught to fear strangers. Drivers angrily honk their horns, then give one another the finger. By no means harmless, yet miniscule compared to nation against nation. Auschwitz. Hiroshima. Saigon. Indiscriminate land mines. Smart bombs. Barrel bombs. Entire cities under siege. Starvation. Suicide vests. Car bombs. Every third day or so, another event before the terrorists themselves are gunned down. Millions of refugees. No place to put them all. No easy answers. Now everything is by the sweat of the brow.

9/11 in New York and in Newtown and even in our town: doors busted, walls kicked, men shouting and cursing, women and children crying.

Neglect and war and fraud and a thousand other

things lead to food shortages and starvation. And the haunting suspicion that the beasts we eat just might be more knowledgeable and aware than we like to think they are. Sex trafficking. Drug abuse. Ubiquitous crime. Exploitation. Bullying one another . . . on the playground, in the conference room, around the dining room table. And we are not just the victims. We are not just the victims. Sin of all sorts, in what we say, think and do . . . and fail to do. It's who we are. It's the stuff we're made of. Something has gone terribly wrong, not just with others but with you and me. And when I consider that God is just and holy and that he still punishes sin . . . *sometimes it causes me to tremble.*

But then, think of the mercy God has had on us. Garments made of leather for Adam and Eve. First promise of a Savior who will crush the serpent's head. "I know the plans I have for you" declares the Lord, "plans not to harm you, but to prosper you and give you hope and a future" An enslaved people called out of Egypt to be his people. Manna in the desert. Water from the rock. The bronze serpent on a pole. How patient he is! How merciful! Sometimes it causes me to tremble. "Hosea, go love your wife who is beloved of another, even as I the Lord your God love my people Israel."

Then the Lord said Abraham, "The outcry against Sodom is so great and their sin so grievous." And yet the promise to Abraham: for the sake of ten righteous people, I will not destroy it.

And the Lord said to Jonah, "Do you do well to be angry? . . . You have been concerned about this vine. But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?"

When I think about the terrible faith of God's ancient people, their short memories, their rank hypocrisy, their unrepentant wickedness, their grumbling, their fist shaking at God . . . and yet how he stuck with them, never turned his back on them, still called them "my people", and loved them

though they were unlovable. Sometimes it causes me to tremble.

Then, when I think of what God did, coming down to the world as one of us and for us, in the flesh. Baby in a manger. Approachable. Nothing to fear in that one. “All hell doth at His presence quake though He Himself for cold doth shake.” “Oh come let us adore him.” So vulnerable. So weak. So humble. No room for him in the inn. No room for him in Herod’s kingdom. Little room for him in our culture too, for the sinful heart is full of hostility for God.

And yet he reclines at table with sinners and prostitutes. He calls tax collectors to be his disciples, and James and John, so ambitious, and Peter, with all his faults and failures, and you and me, with all of ours. His opponents call him, “Friend of Sinners”. Thank God! What a Friend *we* have in Jesus!

With his miracles he starts reversing the effects of the fall, to remind us of how the world once worked, and how it one day will work again. He quiets the storm, heals the sick, expels the demons, even gives wine and a lot of it (about 150 gallons or so) to cover the shortfall at a wedding. Where Jesus is, there are no shortfalls. When he feeds the hungry, there are 12 baskets full leftover. When he tells fishermen to cast their net off the other side of the boat, the net is so full that it nearly turns the boat over. “Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered. Everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.”

He invites the good and the bad, forgives the good and the bad. He raises the dead. “Love to the loveless shown That they might lovely be.”

Yet every step of the way he faces opposition. “Why, what hath my Lord done? What makes this rage and spite?” Unrighteous anger. Crucify Him! The governor wishing more to appease the crowd (and Caesar) than to appease God. And so, quivering ribbons of flesh. Blood everywhere. Bruises black and blue. Puffed eyes with spittle on them. Dislocated joints. “Hail, King of the

Jews!” “A murderer they save, the Prince of Life they slay.”

“Were you there when they nailed him to a tree?”

“Save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross!” “He saved others; he cannot save himself.” “He trusts in God; let God deliver him.”

Yet what does he say? Very little, actually. Mostly like a lamb, he keeps silent. But when he does speak, it’s: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Or “Today you will be with me in paradise” Or “My God, my God, why hast Thou abandoned me.” Which tells us God has turned his back on his own Son, whom he loves. It tells us, “He who knew no sin has become sin for us.” It tells us the Lamb of God has taken away our sin. One last gasp, and then: dead. A spear into the side for good measure, just to make sure of it. Hopelessly dead. Irrevocably dead. Not unlike the hollowed, mangled carcass of a deer that’s been by the side of the road all winter long. Dead. Somehow in a way we’ll never fully understand, on the cross our God is dead. Sometimes it causes me to tremble.

Who are you? “Who am I that for my sake my Lord should take Frail flesh and die?” “Would He devote that sacred head For such a worm as I?”

“While we were yet sinners, God loved us and Christ died for us.” What had we done to deserve this? What could we do? And yet, see how he loves us! And hear again his promises: “He will be killed , but on the third day he will be raised from the dead.” And, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies!” And, “My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish.” And “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.” “After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb . . . Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every

tear from their eyes.

What a God we have! What a history of salvation! Creation to corruption to redemption to new creation. “Behold, I am doing a new thing.” “See, I will create new heavens and a new earth.” Eden restored. Color and music and peace restored. The soil restored, the sea too, and the air we breathe, the image of God restored in us, the relationship with creation restored, with one another restored. Perfection restored. No more venom. No need for incisors. The bear will graze like the oxen, and when you get to heaven, if you want to wrestle with a grizzly, be my guest, I’ll go second. If you want to sing with all the saints . . . they’ll be there too. And if you just want to thank and praise him face to face with Him, and look at the marks in his hands and feet and side, the marks of your salvation, you can do that too.

But let’s not go there just yet. Let’s not rush on to Easter Day or the Lord’s Day. Instead let’s linger in this day, and return to the hill called The Skull and stay awhile at the foot of the cross. Be still and know that he is God. For we know the Risen Lord *only* through Jesus Christ crucified.

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?  
Sometimes it causes me to tremble. Amen.

