

March 23, 2011  
Sermon for Lent III  
St Peter Lutheran Church  
Bowie, TX  
Larry Knobloch, Pastor

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Matthew 27:26-31 (ESV)

<sup>26</sup> Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified. <sup>27</sup> Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. <sup>28</sup> And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, <sup>29</sup> and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" <sup>30</sup> And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head. <sup>31</sup> And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible : English Standard Version*. Wheaton : Standard Bible Society, 2001

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Amen.

In the heart of Berlin, Germany, stands a modern looking Lutheran church, the *Kaiser Wilhelm Kirche*, erected after WWII. Next to it, in shocking contrast, looms the ragged, charred outline of the original Kaiser Wilhelm Church, bombed during the war. It is almost beyond recognition. Instead of leveling this eyesore in an effort to erase the horrors of war, Berliners chose to leave it standing on one of their busiest streets, a reminder to all who pass, that war, although necessary at times, is an evil thing and that they did not want to bring war's miseries and destruction upon themselves again.

When the long awaited, much prayed for day of deliverance finally arrived and the LORD set the Israelites free from their Egyptian slave masters, God decreed that these emancipated people should not forget the bitterness of their 400 years of bondage. First, their masters had oppressed them with forced labor, to weaken the Israelites. Their lives were increasingly bitter when as their work began to include hard labor in making bricks and mortar.

As the Israelites continued to work through this adversity, Pharaoh took the unprecedented step of ordering the midwives of the Israelites to kill every newborn Hebrew boy. No mercy, no excuses. Bitterness on top of bitterness. A bitterness that they dare not forget.

So it was after they painted their doorframes with the blood of the year-old lamb so that the angel of death would pass over their dwellings and strike down only the first-born of the Egyptians, then they went into their own homes and sat down to a victory celebration, the Seder meal, which means a meal eaten in a “set order”. It included the roasted lamb and unleavened bread, but also bitter herbs (EX 12:8). The Passover was their victory dinner, but why did the menu feature bitter herbs? It is believed that horseradish was one of several that were used.

But again, why? Why did they need to remember what they surely wanted to forget? Why, each year, year after year, when they celebrated Passover, must they always eat such bitter food? Why do they have to remember anyway?

Whenever we forget the past, we end up forgetting lessons learned, not just those we learned personally, but those that others have learned too. We are living in a world where everyone’s hands and hearts are soiled with sin. True, the Israelites has not brought their suffering upon themselves as the Berliners had; but we all, including the Israelites, must live out our days in a fallen world; a world where each of us fails to live up to our potential and, even worse, to God’s expectations and requirements. ; a world where we push God aside to live by our own wits and wisdom and suffer the consequences of our idolatry of self.

We live in a world where bitterness is a reality, and we must remember it is so. If we do not remember, then what? What are the consequences? Do we blame God for living in a world that is torn by our sin? Do we blame others when we fail without taking any responsibility for our own actions and sins?

Without remembering the bitterness, we might develop what some call a royalty complex, where we think that it is our right to live above it all like kings and queens. We believe that we deserve the good life, and we think that justifies our lying, cheating and even killing in order to get what we want.

What's more, when we forget the truth about life, that it is fallen, it's broken, it's separated from God, then we forget that everything that we take so for granted – our jobs, our friends and families, the weather, political freedoms, our abilities and opportunities...they are all Gods undeserved gifts!

When we forget these truths, we turn into whiners and complainers, unprepared to handle problems and adversity. We need our own bitter herbs like the horseradish roots, lest we forget who we are and what we should expect in this life.

As the usher passes by, take a small cup from the tray. We normally associate blessings from these communion trays but tonight, they represent the bitterness of life. In the cup is a bit of horseradish. Smell it and if you are of a mind to, dip your finger into it and taste just a little.

Taste the bitterness and remember the bitterness of what life in this world is like and what you and I are like.

And most importantly, taste the bitter root as a reminder about our God. He is a God who hears our groans of disappointment and bitterness, who knows that some of it at least, if not most of it, is of our own making – and still never turns away from us. He sent Moses to face off with the Israelite's oppressors.

He sends One greater than Moses, not only to face our oppressors and slave masters, but to swallow all the bitter pains this life can create, all the bitterness of broken relationships and war and cheating ... all the bitterness we've created and introduced into the world.

Up on the cross, Jesus swallowed it all – my sin, yours, everyone's – in our place because we couldn't do it ourselves. And we are to remember, even if it means swallowing a bitter root, we are to remember what He has done for us, lest we be tempted to do it all over again and ignore the salvation won by Jesus' sacrifice on Calvary's cross.

Jesus is with us and for us in every situation, for after our sins killed Him, God raised Him from death. No sin, no evil, nor hurt will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:39)

God's love is so great that He invested His Son, Jesus Christ, to become one of us, to suffer as one of us and even suffer our punishment from God for us so that we never need to suffer God's wrath.

We taste the bitterness of sin while on this earth, but in faith, we look forward to the perfect fruit of Christ's labors; eternal life with Him in heaven.

"Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:25)

Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.

Adapted from the Lenten series: *Christ our Passover* by Rev. Dr. David Peter