

+ Good Friday + Sermon preached at Saint Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church (WELS),  
Tomah WI on April 19, 2019. Pastor Curt S. Backhaus

*Mark 15:33-36*

*At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"--which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*

"To err is human; to forgive divine." Nowhere is that clearer to us than here at the foot of our Savior's cross on this Friday we call "Good."

Who is this hanging here? Why all this suffering?

Just read the sign; this is "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Mary's boy. The Rabbi. The one who got in the way of the Jewish rulers. Another Jew who suffered the consequences of posing a threat to Rome's power and peace.

Ah, but there's more to this man than that. Dig deeper into the Scriptures. Look closer. This is none other than "Jesus, the Christ, true God, begotten of his Father from eternity and also true man, born of the virgin Mary." My Lord. My Savior. My God. Your Lord. Your Savior. Your God.

See him suffer. Hear him cry out in agony. Watch him bleed. Hear how he thirsts. See how he dies. It is painfully obvious how human this Jesus is. There's no denying that.

But at the same time we cannot --we dare not-- miss the fact that this Jesus is fully divine. Who but God could cry out for mercy and beg forgiveness for his tormentors even as they hammered spikes through the bones in his wrists and his ankles and deep into the timbers that formed his cross? Who but God could --in the midst of that inexplicable pain and suffering--show concern for his mother and his best friend and make sure they were loved and cared for once he was dead and gone? Who but God could promise and deliver Paradise to the penitent thief? Who but God could die --not with a whimper--but with a triumphant shout, "It is finished!?" Who but God could lay down his life, only to take it up again?

"To err is human; to forgive divine."

This Jesus is fully human --like us in every way--"yet without sin." Read the Gospels for yourselves. Learn of his perfect life of love. Then, you take him and you put him on trial again if that's what it takes to convince you. You won't be able to accuse him --let alone convict him-- of any wrongdoing either. No! You, too, will have to conclude and confess with the man hanging next to Jesus that when we suffer "we are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But his man is completely innocent." Falsely accused. Unjustly condemned. Crucified. Dead. And buried. But, wrongly? Innocently? All in error?

Indeed "to err is human!" The fault, the blame, the reason, the necessity for his crucifixion, the sin is mine, not his. It's yours, not his. But, "to forgive is divine!" For that reason, that

purpose, for you, for me, for a world full of sinners, “God made him who had no sin, to be sin for us.”

Listen as Jesus gets what our sins deserve, “Eloi! Eloi! Lama sabachthani!” Consider what it meant for the Divine to forgive. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Who forsook whom?

Way back “in the beginning,” God said, “Let us make man in our own image.” So, he created them “male and female.” The one True God –Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Three Persons yet one God, one in Being, throughout eternity sharing the same indivisible Essence, Unity, Holiness, Harmony, Glory and Love, this Trinity fashioned our first parents, Adam and Eve, with body, soul and every blessing, to be like God in holiness, to be with God in Paradise, to walk with God and to talk with God.

And all that was lost in the Fall. Rebellion and sin destroyed that beautiful relationship and brought the curse of sin, death and damnation into God’s creation. So what did God do? Scrap it all and start over? No! Right then and there God the Father promised to send God the Son to crush the devil’s head, to put an end to the curse of sin, to give life eternal where there was now only death and damnation.

And to do that, to redeem, to restore, to renew, God did the unthinkable, the unimaginable, the impossible, the inexplicable. God the Father forsook God the Son. God the Father turned his back on God the Son, condemning Jesus Christ to the eternal torments of hell. Why? “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Jesus knows why. He’s God after all; he knows all things. Along with his Father and the Holy Spirit, God’s Son planned all of this within the mystery that is the Trinity. The God-man Jesus welcomed it. So why does Jesus ask, “Why?”

In agony he asks, “Why?” so you wrestle with who this Jesus is and why he is on the cross. And then you answer that question for yourself. “Why? Truth is: it was either him or it was me.”

When you are painfully aware of how Holy and Just our God is and how sinful and utterly contemptible we are in thought, word and deed and how damnable that makes us, --though we shake our heads when we see Jesus suffer so, though we will only dare to whisper it-- we want Jesus on that cross, we need Jesus on that cross.

We need this God that will always love us –even to this extreme. We want this Savior that welcomes our hell so that he can grace and gift us with eternal life in heaven.

And that is why we will confess and praise his name all our days. That is why one day soon we will gather around his throne in heaven and worship him for all eternity. Amen.