

“Face It”
Good Friday

April 14, 2017
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Rev. Brent Hartwig

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be unto you from Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior and God our Heavenly Father. Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Introduction] “Let's be honest.”

“Let's not beat around the bush.”

“Let's admit it.”

“Let's face it.” We are all going to die someday. There is no getting around that fact.

And today makes that perfectly clear.

Even Jesus himself, the very Son of God, yet fully human, could not escape death.

The innocent one was suffering for the sins of the guilty.

The Creator was dying for the sins of his creatures.

The Son of God was shedding his blood

for the transgressions we committed against his own majesty.

He went to the cross on this day.

He suffered enormous pain.

His head and side bled.

His hands and feet were nailed to the cross beams.

There was nothing pretty about this type of death – It was gory and gruesome.

AND Yet... People came to witness this spectacle.

People came to face the cross, to face Jesus.

[Three Types]

Some came to hurl insults at Jesus.

“He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God,’

(Matthew 27:42-43).

Can't you imagine them shaking their heads in disgust or disappointment.

Now others watched from a distance, to pay their respects, it seems.

“Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome” (Mark 15:40).

Can't you imagine them bowing their heads in reverence.

Then we come to the centurion, who stood facing Jesus,

“saw that in this way he breathed his last,”

and proclaimed in all certainty,

“Truly this man was the Son of God” (Mark 15:39).

We get the sense from this Passion narrative that the centurion had his eyes fixed on Jesus and that he was aware of all that had happened that day to Jesus, leading up to his last breath.

And it was this compilation of events and circumstances that led the centurion to make this statement of faith.

There are those who faced Jesus with scorn.

There are those who could not face Jesus in shame.

And there are those, like the Centurion, who faced Jesus and saw the truth...

“Truly this man was the Son of God” (Mark 15:39).

[***And You...***]

In the face of Jesus, who are you on this day?

How are you facing the cross of Christ?

And how are you facing the death you see there?

We may be quick to say we are never like the scoffers who faced the cross of Christ and his death with little respect or regard. But in many ways, we do act like them from time to time.

- We don't always give the cross of Christ the respect it deserves, especially when we consider it more as a fashion statement instead of an icon of faith.
- We don't always respect the name of our Lord, especially when we use his name in vain.
- We don't always acknowledge with-all-of-our-hearts the depth of the sacrifice Christ made for us on the cross.

For all these sins, we come to the cross today to confess our disobedience.

Are you like the women who stood at a distance?
They were reverent, to be sure, but they were afraid to come close to the cross.
Do we sometimes act like that as well?
Do we hold back from fully experiencing what the cross means to us?
Are we often afraid to face head-on what Christ did for us through his death?
Are we afraid to be seen revering our Lord in the light of day, in the midst of others?
For these sins, we come to the cross today confessing our reticence.

How can we be more like the centurion today,
 who took in all the events of this holy day
 with his eyes wide open
 and came face-to-face with the cross of Christ
 and declared for all to hear,
 “Truly this man was the Son of God” (Mark 15:39).

[Our Call]

“Let's be honest.”

“Let's not beat around the bush.”

“Let's admit it.”

“Let's face it.”

Our call from God is to look straight at the cross
 and right at our Savior,
 and confess him today as our Lord and Savior.

When we come out of the shadows
 and put our full attention on the cross of Christ,
 we come to see what the snake-bitten Israelites from long ago saw.

They looked up at a snake that Moses lifted up on a pole by God's command that cured them of their wounds so that they would not die.	We look to the cross and face the death there, the Son of God lifted up on a pole, and realize that by that cross the wounds of our sins are healed and our lives are restored in Christ Jesus.
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We know when we witness this scene in all its gore and glory
 that we do not need fear death anymore.

Christ's death has taken away the sting, the bite of death,
 and cured us of the death-inducing disease of sin.

No longer do we need to shake our heads in disappointment and disbelief.

We have witnessed a miracle on the cross

and that miracle makes us want to stand up and lift up our heads and say,
‘Truly, truly, I am free. I am free from the power of death forevermore.’

And that revelation helps us as we face the inevitability of death in this sin-sick world.

Yes, loved ones will die and we must face that fact.

Yes, we will die someday. That is true.

But there is a greater truth, the truth of the cross, that supersedes all other truths.

We no longer have to wallow in sorrow when a loved one dies.

We are sad for a time, but we know that the truth of heaven awaits us.

We know that we will one day be together with them in the paradise above,

facing our Savior who will be lifted high,

not on a cross, but on a throne,

surrounded by all believers who have faced death

and triumphed

and are singing his praises forevermore.

“Let's be honest.”

“Let's not beat around the bush.”

“Let's admit it.”

“Let's face it.”

That is the vision that we see through the eyes of faith

when we look at the cross this day

and when we say with the centurion,

“Truly this man was the Son of God” (Mark 15:39).

So say it with me...

“Truly this man was the Son of God” (Mark 15:39).

Amen.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, ...
to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations,
for ever and ever! AMEN!
