

John 19

“Death Close-Up”

Good Friday

March 30, 2018

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

Pastor Hartwig

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God, Our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

[Introduction] It was the first day of 7th grade.

I had certainly *known of* people who had died,
but I had not *known* a single person who had died.
Now I was standing beside the casket of my Grandpa Hartwig.

I was remembering his smile, remembering his cap and pipe, remembering him sitting at the local gas station talking to the guys . . . just remembering.

That day I experienced death close-up.

Death had invaded my life, and death brought hurt.

I had to deal with pain that was real

I wasn't sure how to react, where to go, when to talk, what to do.

I didn't know what my world would be like without him.

I was dealing with death close-up.

Earlier this year, in five weeks, we had eight families that dealt with death.

Death was tangible and real.

Death was close-up, in your face, and personal.

And again, today,

On Good Friday we deal with death close-up.

We stand not beside a casket of a parent or grandparent,

child or any other family member.

We stand at the foot of the cross of Jesus Christ.

We experience the reality of death, his death.

AND We realize that death does come close—to each of us.

[Death]

Death is an enemy.

And death would be cold and dark and empty,

except that Jesus has come close to us and has faced death for us.

His death changes our experience of death.

Oh, we are not immune to death.

To live in our world means that we must face it.

And death can be frightening.

Sometimes it invades our lives with blazing speed.

Sometimes it is slow and relentless as it stalks its target.

Death comes in many ways, but it comes.

It doesn't always seem fair.

It can surprise and shock.

It can pierce like a knife.

The sky can be blue, the sunshine bright, the air crisp and clean
—and in a moment darkness descends.

To be human is to live life that is fragile.

Death does come close to us.

And death would indeed leave us terrorized and empty
except for what took place *ONE* Friday.

We call it good, a Friday when Jesus experienced death close-up —for us.

[*Suffering Savior*]

The prophet Isaiah painted a poetic picture of what this Friday would be.

He described a Savior, a Suffering Savior,

who would stand in our place and experience death close-up.

For us who are part of a fallen humanity, death is justice.

It is a verdict that fits the crime.

We have disobeyed God and deserve death.

But now the Suffering Savior comes near.

As Isaiah describes it,

“He was despised and rejected by men,

a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering...

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrow ...

He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities ...

The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. . . .

He was cut off from the land of the living. . . .

He was assigned a grave with the wicked” (vv 3–9).

He experienced death up close.

[*Come Near*]

It is such a comfort that when we face danger,

we have a heavenly Savior who seeks to come near!

About three months ago we celebrated Christmas.
We rejoiced that God loved us so much that he was born among us.
 However, the power of the incarnation is
 not just that Christ was born to join us in life.
 But that He was born in order to join us in death also.

He is no distant God – viewing our world from a heavenly executive palace.
 He comes to be close to the pain.
 He comes to walk with us in our sorrow.
 He comes to carry us in our infirmities.
 He comes to be near to us in all that causes us heartache.
 He comes to face it all with us.
He is no distant God. Instead, He goes the distance to be with us!

Our Suffering Savior knows death close-up.
 He felt the bite of death.
 He winced at the piercing of the nails.
 He didn't simply view death from a casual distance.
 He was no simple spectator.
 He joined himself to us and absorbed the blows of the hammer
 that should have been ours.

In his death he carried our sorrows.
 He came to the scene of our guilt.
 He stretched out his hands to receive our sin.
 He looked death in the eye.
 He left nothing undone.
 He said, "It is finished" (In 19:30).

All was completed; the obligation paid.
 He closed the book on our failure.
 The debt was settled. All was accomplished.

On this Friday we stand at the foot of the cross to view a crucified Jesus.
 We experience death close-up, in your face, and personal.

[*Everything Changes*]

On this Friday something has changed.
 In fact, because of Jesus, *everything* is changed.

We can look into the eyes of death and see not a conquering villain
but an enemy that is conquered.
We see that this Friday is *Good Friday*.
We have vision that takes us beyond this moment
and allows us to look to the empty tomb.
Now we can see victory in death.
Now we can find hope in sorrow.
We have a Suffering Savior who experienced death close-up—and overcame it.
Our Lord swallowed death. He tasted it for us.

[*A Story – An Example*] There was a woman
Death stalked her for months. Her cancer had returned, and it was brutal.
She fought valiantly, but her strength to rally was gone.
Her family and pastor formed a circle around her bed and waited.
They were looking death in the eye.
They felt the pain.
They spoke of events in her life, and they marveled at her bravery.
They remembered and they prayed,
but mostly they waited. Have you been there?
Her husband had reached the point of praying
that God would simply take her home.
And God did answer that prayer. And everyone felt the loss.

But, you know, something else took place in that room that evening.
As the family experienced death close-up,
it also experienced the Lord close-up.

He was near even in the pain.
And He was bringing His mercy. Lord, have mercy.
He was bringing His peace – the peace that surpasses all understanding.
They were able to see past the grave to the empty tomb.

[*Conclusion*]

We too are able to see past Good Friday's grief to our Lord's victory.
For we have a Suffering Savior who experienced death close-up.
He won. He lives! And because he lives, we shall live.
Death comes, but Christ gives life. Amen.

“Now may the God of peace... equip you with everything good
that you may do his will, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.
Amen.” (Heb 13:20-21)
