

Friday, March 30, 2018 – Good Friday
“Heading Home – Forgiven, More Forgiving”

1 Peter 3: 18-22

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Adapted from CSL “Calling Us Home” Series

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Let me begin by sharing with you my concern as I began out to prepare this Good Friday sermon. There are some days when it is harder to preach than others. Good Friday is one of those challenging days. You might think it's easy. After all, we're sinners, Jesus died for our sins, and I'm forgiven and can go on with life. That's exactly the problem. We've heard the Good Friday message so often that it might lose its impact. "I'm a sinner, Jesus died for my sins, and so I'm forgiven and I've got it made." You see what I mean? Good Friday not only presents a challenge to the preacher; it also challenges you the listener. You dare not take this Good Friday sermon and service on autopilot. Pray God that you and I hear the dear old story in a fresh way. Dear Jesus, may we become more devoted to You and Your cross.

Our text talks about Baptism. Your Baptism oriented your whole life. You could have gone this way; you could have gone that way, but the miracle of Baptism moved you to say, "My whole life will be oriented toward God. I'm going to love God with all my heart and with all my soul and with all my strength, as the Bible tells me to do (Deuteronomy 6:5). From the day of my Baptism until the day of my death, I'm heading home, heading home to God." By the work of God's Spirit, you pledged yourself to God. The pastor said, "Receive the sign of the holy cross both upon your forehead and upon your heart to mark you as one redeemed by Christ the crucified." Then the pastor asked you or asked your sponsors to answer on your behalf, "Do you renounce the devil? Do you renounce all his works?" Do you renounce all his ways? Do you believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth? Do you believe in Jesus Christ who was crucified, died and was buried? Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian

Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting?" To all those questions, you or your sponsors answering for you said, "Yes."

Over the years you have reaffirmed this direction for your life over and over again, every Sunday when you come to church, every time you read your Bible or pray or have family devotions. Sin and Satan still lurk; you're not home yet. So this Good Friday is another important mile-marker on your way home. Our life journey could well be summed up by the psalmist, Psalm 73: "Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Psalm 73: 25–26).

Let's tell the truth. We're not as focused upon God as we should be. That's why we especially need an impact from this Good Friday. We dare never take Jesus suffering and death on the cross for granted. Without Good Friday we have no forgiveness and no hope for our heavenly inheritance. There's a story, a true story, about a dog called Shep. Shep belonged to an old man in Ft. Benton, Montana. When the old man died, his body was placed in a casket, taken down to the train station, and shipped east for burial. No one paid much attention to the dog hanging around the station; some stray, they thought. That was Shep. He saw the casket of his master loaded onto the train and hung around the train station from that day on. He wouldn't go home with anyone else. People at the station fed and took care of him. Every day for six years, Shep waited expectantly for every incoming train, hoping to see again his master. Oh, would that we be so focused on our divine Master! Would that this Good Friday, this service, this sermon and our devotion renew the focus of our lives upon God!

We will see our Master. We will see God but not without Good Friday. The Bible says, "Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God." Jesus is the "righteous" one, totally right with God, no sins of His own for which He must pay the price. The righteous one gave His life for the unrighteous, for you and for me. Peter

reminds us that we were redeemed “not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Peter 1:18–19).

Because of Good Friday you are forgiven. Because of Good Friday the promises of Baptism, forgiveness, life and salvation really are true. Because of Good Friday you can make good on your baptismal pledge to live for God, the Spirit helping you. Because of Good Friday you can know the homecoming will happen. We prodigals will arrive at the arms of our Master and our waiting Father. Do we have difficulties on this way home? Yes, of course. Do we get detoured on the way home? Yes, we sometimes do forget the goal given at Baptism. Do sins entice us from the straight and narrow way home? Yes, and so we repent daily. We are “peculiar” people who keep one another focused on the goal, mindful of the direction given us all in Baptism. We’re heading home and Jesus is leading us there. “Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.”

Now that wouldn’t be worth the paper it’s written on if God hadn’t raised Jesus from the dead. Good Friday earned your forgiveness; the resurrection on Easter gives you assurance that the Father has accepted His Son’s sacrifice for your sin. Your Baptism is for real. Baptism... now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

Sad, dark, gloomy Good Friday gives way to Easter. If it wouldn’t, “your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:17). Therefore, you and I can be more forgiving as we journey home to God. Because of Good Friday and Easter, we know who we are, forgiven and heading home. We “peculiar” people can be more forgiving to one another as we together head home. The love shown us can cover the multitude of our sins (1 Peter 4:8). And to those outside the church, to those who are not yet following Jesus, the way, the truth and the life... To those who might hurt or harm us in one way or another... We can be more forgiving to them too.

Since your life is caught up with God, don't brood over their sins against you. After all, their sins are between them and God. Let the Father take care of their sins. But for us, why should you and I live our lives in the bondage of unforgiveness? Forgiven and heading home, we can be more forgiving to all. That's because we are sure of our Jesus, crucified, risen, ascended and "at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him." You might say we can be more forgiving because we are comfortable in our own skin, the skin of Jesus, the skin of the Body of Christ.

So, yes, it's a challenge to preach and for us all to take to heart the eternal importance of Good Friday. My prayer for you is that this special service will lock your sight on the cross. Devotedly we wait to see our Master. Jesus' cross is the reason the way is open and we're heading home. In Jesus' name, amen.