

I Did It

a sermon based on

John 18:1—19:45

and delivered on

April 19, 2019

Good Friday (Year C)

at

Cherry Valley United Methodist Church

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What brings us to Good Friday from Palm Sunday?

We have a tendency to get very rah-rah about our faith and salvation to the point of forgetting that it is OUR sin – that it is MY sin that nailed Jesus to the cross even if it was God’s love for ME – for US that led him there.

I don’t think this contradicts what I said on Sunday (Palm/Passion Sunday). I believe that Jesus died more for the sake of meeting death head on so that he could conquer it – rather than as taking on the punishment that I deserved.

We were made in the image of God. Genesis 2:7 speaks of the Lord God breathing into the man’s nostrils the breath of life. God didn’t do that for any other creature. In Hebrew – like in Greek – the word for breath is the same word as spirit.

Ponder that for a moment....{pause} God didn’t just force some air into the man’s lungs. God infused him – God infused in humanity – God infused in us life tied to his Spirit.

The consequence of our sin is death, because our life – human life – depends on God’s Spirit vivifying us. Sin shoves God’s spirit out. No spirit – no life – it’s that simple.

So... what brings us here, tonight? On Ash Wednesday and those first Sundays of Lent, I asked you to take a nail. I asked you to hold on to that nail, to use it as means of confession to rub in your sins and even your temptations.

What did you do with it? Did you keep it with you? Did you put it on your nightstand or dresser where you just left it? Did you put it somewhere where you “knew” you’d keep track of it, but can’t remember where that place is? What’s it look like now? Did you forget all about it?

Our sins remain even when we hide them or put them on dresser or nightstand, even if they slip into the couch so that we forget them and give them up as “lost” – they’re still there. The effect of our sins remains even when we’ve forgotten what they were or convinced ourselves that they weren’t really sins because we know better.

The problem with our sins is that they are willful.

Our sins are more than mistakes or errors –
They are intentional affronts to God.
Even when we’re not aware of it.

I had this discussion with some colleagues a few years ago. The Lutherans didn’t quite buy into it. I’ll admit, I didn’t defend it well. At the time, I’d made an assumption about theological perspective.

As a Methodist – as one at home in Wesleyan and Arminian theology – the idea of sin as intentional makes sense to me. It makes sense to me whether it’s a sin of commission or omission. It makes sense to me whether it was a sinful act or a sinful thought. It makes sense to me whether it was something that I knew or should have known was a sin, or if it was something that I didn’t realize was a sin. It makes sense to me because I had – I have – a choice.

God has given me – God has given each of us – free will. We choose to do what we do. And we have to own that not so that we’ll feel bad, but so that we can move forward.

As Methodist we talk about Preventive, Justifying and Sanctifying Grace. I know the Emmaus crowd is familiar with the terms. But allow me to give a brief summary.

Sanctifying Grace – is grace that makes us holy. It sanctifies us. Even though we have to respond to claim it, it’s at God’s initiative.

Justifying Grace – justifies us – in it God says, “You sinned, but I’m not going to hold you to the consequences. Preventive – from the Latin *pre-veni* (before come) – Preventive Grace is grace that comes before. Before we even consciously think about or acknowledge God, God loves us and puts things in place to draw us toward him and his love for us.

That’s why we should contemplate where sin has infected our lives – not in fear of the consequences – but in an awareness that when God draws our sin to the surface – like a rescuer – sucking the venom from a snake bite – that

he's doing it so that sin's poison might come out of us. Our conviction of sin allows us to accept his forgiveness and to be justified. Awareness of our ongoing tendency to sin enables us to seek out those holy encounters by which God breathes into our nostrils again pushing more and more of that sin away until we have been perfectly restored.

I did it. I led Jesus to death on that cross. If it weren't for my sin – death would have no power to be defeated.

These nails that you've had – tonight is a choice.

A choice for each of us.

Will you hold on to your sin?

Will you look for a place to hide it?

Hoping that it won't turn up again?

Or will you accept the grace that Jesus Christ offers you by giving it up to him?

Before you answer, "Yes," it's not an easy answer, because in giving it up, it means taking responsibility.

It means taking responsibility for driving those nails into his hands and feet,

Will you leave your sins ... here

So that Christ's love for you may not be in vain, but might instead restore your life and beget your salvation.

AMEN