



## Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

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**Good Friday**  
**10 am & 7 pm**

**April 18, 2014**

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## “Big Death, Little Death”

*(John 19:17-30)*

Rev. David K. Groth

17 and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. 18 There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. 19 Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." 20 Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. 21 So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" 22 Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written." 23 When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, 24 so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, "They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." So the soldiers did these things, 25 but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" 27 Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. 28 After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." 29 A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. 30 When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (John 19:17-30)

### **Collect of the Day**

Almighty God, graciously behold this Your family for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed and delivered into the hands of sinful men to suffer death upon the cross; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Amen**

When the last parent dies in the home, often the children will have an estate sale, where a price tag is put on just about everything in the house. Everything must go. It's a sort of "Going out of Business Sale" for our own personal lives. A lifetime of accumulation is dispersed in a day or two, and the proceeds given away.

When you walk around estate sales, what you see, especially in the basements, are a lot of unfinished projects, unfulfilled plans. An old mantle clock in a cardboard box on the work bench, partially dismantled. Someone intended to repair it, clean it, oil it and take it back upstairs. But illness and death put an end to those plans.

There might be a ping pong table covered with a thin layer of dust that tells you it's been a long time since it was used even by the grandchildren who, presumably, are grown and gone and raising their own families now.

A three piece set of luggage with a little mildew in places. But the wheelchair and the walker for sale upstairs, and the grab bars in the bathroom, it all tells you that luggage probably hadn't been used for years.

Note: they didn't get rid of the stuff before. Apparently they lacked the energy to do so, or they were hoping that whatever it was they were suffering from was a temporary setback, and they would soon be back on their feet, and could get back to traveling and ping pong and fixing clocks.

There's something sad about estate sales. They are a reminder that life is short, and is always cut short, always

interrupted. We always die with unfinished projects. Estate sales are also a reminder that there's not a whole lot of meaning after all to be found in the accumulation of goods. And they are a reminder also that death is inevitable. Not all the physicians at Mayo clinic can hold your death at bay indefinitely. "The wages of sin is death." God has so decreed it. Dust we are and to dust we shall return . . . because of sin. Therefore death already has a grip on each of us, and no one can pry death's grip off of us. Unwillingly, we move nearer each day to our graves, to the end of all our projects and plans.

But thanks be to God, it's only a little death that we suffer, made little by His big death on a cross. More on that in a bit.

Our text takes us just outside the walls of Jerusalem on a little hill called Calvary. Three men are being put to death there. These three have been tried and condemned as criminals, sentenced to be taken out and hung until they die. Two of them have a pretty dark history. One of these two admits as much, acknowledging he's getting what he deserved. But that was not true of the man on the center cross. Even one of the criminals next to Jesus recognized that. How did he know? He couldn't have had much contact with Jesus, probably hadn't seen Him until they were thrown together by the soldiers. But somehow he knew an innocent man when he saw one, and now this innocent man is put together with him, treated as one just like himself. They share the same execution together, the innocent with the guilty. In a way, they become brothers in death.

We know a good deal more about the man on the center cross. We have followed Jesus' life through this first half of the church year. We saw Him born just like one of us and grow into a man who worked as a carpenter until he was about 30 years old. Jesus shared our whole life with us. He was our brother in everything, except that he did not sin. Jesus' life was in perfect harmony with God. He had no life apart from God. So the question is, "Why then did Jesus die?"

On the surface, the religious authorities played a part because they hated Jesus, felt their positions were threatened by him, and so they helped organize his execution. On the surface, the treachery and greed of Judas also played a part, and the cowardice of Pilate who didn't want to jeopardize his job, and those in the crowd who allowed themselves to be whipped up into the frenzy, and the soldiers who brutally manhandled and crucified Jesus. . . all these played a part in Jesus' death.

But beneath the surface there's more, much more. We see how Jesus did not resist his arrest. This time he has gone up to Jerusalem deliberately to be delivered into the hands of sinners and to be crucified in order to give his life as a ransom for many. Jesus death' did not overtake him accidentally or unexpectedly. He went out to meet it. He said, "I lay down my life . . . No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have the power to lay it down and the power to take it up again" (Jn. 10:17-18). Death did not cut him down; it was the fulfillment of his whole mission.

So this death was of his choosing. He went straight at death. This is clear from the fact that Jesus died sooner than expected. It surprised even Pilate who had considerable experience in such matters.

Remember how the high priests were concerned these dying men would spoil their holy Sabbath? They would have to be finished off. Pilate consented. Breaking their legs would speed things up. But when they came to Jesus, they found he had already died. Just to make sure of it, a soldier ran his spear into Jesus' side.

Now there are a couple of levels to the death of Jesus. There is the physical death by crucifixion. When a man is nailed to a cross and left hanging there, eventually, he dies. There was nothing unusual about that; the Romans put to death thousands in the same brutal way.

But beneath the physical death is the other death – the "big death" for sin. This is the death of the Lamb of God, the one without spot or blemish who takes our sin on

himself and takes its condemnation and punishment for us. It is the death of the Servant of God on whom God lays the iniquities of us all. Bearing those iniquities, guilty with our sin, Jesus is forsaken of God, abandoned by him, and that is a sort of hell all its own. And so he cries the cry of utter dereliction, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” (Mk. 15:34).

God’s Son, our brother, shared physical death with us. He was human, just like you and me. Joseph and Nicodemus take it upon themselves to take down his corpse. It’s not easy. It’s a messy, bloody business. There are those nails to pull. He’s heavy in ways that only a corpse can be heavy. He is dead weight for them. But they manage and get him down then wrap him in a piece of linen. They put him in a grave. This means whenever we put the body of loved one down into a grave, we know Jesus has been there too. And when we think about our own graves, we know Jesus goes through it with us. In every way he shares our death.

But his death is different from ours. “He was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities” (Is. 53:5). Therefore at the end, he cries out, “It is finished” (Jn. 19:30). And Scripture takes pains to say He cried this out with a loud voice, that is, with authority. It is finished. It is accomplished. The job has been done.

Sin – the thing that is wrong with us – has been answered for, and now it can no longer condemn us. Sin has spent itself against Jesus. It has nothing more to throw at him. Satan will still accuse you of your sin, and will try to damn you for your sin, for that is what he does. He is the great accuser. But his argument is now with Christ, the Lamb of God, who has taken away your sin. And with the loud, triumphant cry Jesus claims the victory. “It is finished.” There’s nothing we need to do to complete the job. That for which Jesus had come has been accomplished. The big death as the Lamb of God has been died.

One small item remains. And that is, your death and mine. It’s a small item really because the power of death has

been broken. The sting of death has been removed. Christ has died the big death for sin, so we don't have to die that death. But we do have our own little deaths to die. And that is trouble enough. In fact, it will consume us if we allow it.

But I'm here to tell you we need not hold our little deaths in dread horror anymore, as if we have no hope. We need not fear our little deaths anymore, as if Jesus never died the big death as the Lamb of God. We need not shrink from our little deaths, as if they will lead only to black nothingness or, even worse, to the fires of hell.

This day, we are reminded that Christ has died for us. The Lamb of God has been sacrificed for your sin. The cost of your sin has been satisfied. The sting of death has been removed.

Death is still the "last enemy". Paul writes, "The last enemy to be destroyed is death." So death is no friend, and suicide is no solution. Death is our enemy.

But it is not the worst enemy, and in Christ, death itself has been dealt a death blow. "Death?" Luther asked. "Death be hanged!" Luther said. "The Lord has promised me I shall live. This I believe."

Big death; little death. Each of us has a little death to die. Maybe it will be heart disease. Maybe it will be an automobile accident. Maybe it will be in a short while, or maybe we have decades left. In any case, the little death, (when your heart stops beating), that lies ahead. But you need not have a dread fear of it, because Christ has already died your big death. He has already suffered for your sins, all of them. Sin has exhausted itself against Jesus. "Therefore", Paul writes, "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (8:1). That's worth repeating. "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Thanks be to God. Amen.



