

Marvel at the Cross!

Sermon for Good Friday

Sermon Text: Isaiah 52:13-15 & 53:1-12



52:13 Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. ¹⁴As many were astonished at you – his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind – ¹⁵so shall he sprinkle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand. ^{53:1}Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? ²For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. ³He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. ⁴Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵But he was

wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. ⁶All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned – every one – to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. ⁷He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. ⁸By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? ⁹And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. ¹⁰Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. ¹¹Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. ¹²Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

The prophet Isaiah foretold the death and resurrection of Jesus long beforehand. The first thing that stands out to Isaiah is that all people will be amazed. Jesus' cross and death are really something amazing! That's why today we also want to draw near to the cross of Jesus in wonder. Why do we marvel at Jesus' crucifixion? That a righteous person suffers for another person's terrible deeds is

nothing new. No, we stand amazed before the cross of Jesus for other reasons. We are amazed because at the cross, the entire world is turned upside down. We are amazed because at the cross of Jesus, everything normal in the world is reversed and runs differently than normal. The normal course of things is that every person tries to save his own life. When an accused person stands before the court of law, he tries everything so that he can be free. You surely know this too! When you have done something wrong, it is very hard to admit your guilt. We would rather say such sentences as: "The other person is guilty too!" or "I couldn't help it because someone forced me to do it!" Or you try to absolve yourself by saying that it wasn't on purpose. People will even go so far as to falsely accuse others so that they themselves can be free. We know the story of the scapegoat too well. And we know exactly how practical it is when someone can direct all the attention from their own mistakes onto someone else. At the cross of Jesus, everything is the opposite. Jesus didn't push the guilt away from Himself. Rather, He took the guilt upon Himself. He does all this out of free will. It is He who gives Himself as the sacrifice so that those who are truly guilty can be free. Shouldn't someone be shouting from the rooftop: Stop! That goes against every law! But our amazement doesn't end at the fact that a law is being broken here. No, it gets worse! The one who is there dying on the cross is not some random person that they pulled off the streets! In Jesus, God Himself is nailed to the cross for our sins. It would be normal for the sinner to be afflicted by God and held accountable for his actions. The exact opposite happens here. The sinner is set free, and the righteous person is punished in his place. Yes, when Jesus dies, the world turns upside down. The One who created life, dies! The One who is the life, is overcome by death. The only One who is righteous, is declared unrighteous while the unrighteous ones are set free. The One who knew no weakness and is clothed with God's glory, takes our grief and weakness upon Himself. And all of this is personally planned by God. Shouldn't the whole world come crashing down here? Shouldn't everything come to a stand still?

Yes, at the cross of Jesus, you can come in amazement. But we don't come just in amazement. Questions come up too! And the first important question is this: Why? Why must God go so far in order to take away sins? Couldn't God have acted differently? We can actually answer this question directly with "yes". Yes, God is all powerful! Yes, there isn't anything God can't do. He can also sweep all the sins from the table in a second. When we ask the question, why He doesn't do that, our question goes too far and we must answer. We don't know why God acted this way and not another way. But we can sense one thing. And that is that through Jesus' cross, it becomes clear how heavy sin is. We can even observe that guilt is heavy in our normal everyday life. Everything we do in our world has consequences. And these consequences weigh heavily. When we live there innocently and use up the resources of our world, our children and others must carry our heavy guilt. And we only need to cast a glance at the present politics to see how severely we suffer the burdens of previous mistakes! And that honestly is the amazing thing about the cross of Jesus. Because the entire burden is on Him! All the guilt of the world! Anyone who is killed by another. Every lie, every unkind word! Everything that I've done! Everything that I fail to do is on this Jesus!

Is that even possible? Is it possible that all the guilt from the past, present, and future can be on one person? Normally you have to say: "No!" that's not possible in any circumstance. The burden of guilt is too big. And besides, how can that even happen that one becomes free because of the suffering of another? Exactly—normally something like this is impossible. And that's exactly why Isaiah explains the cross with different words. What happened on the cross is not normal! It is a miracle! We can't understand this miracle on the cross. We can only approach the miracle tentatively and with wonder.

Perhaps we can venture to imagine the story differently: imagine if Jesus hadn't died on the cross. Imagine it. And imagine God had said that the guilt was too great and that people had to see for themselves how they could deal with it. Actually, it isn't so hard to imagine all this because for many people it's really like this, as if Jesus didn't die on the cross. Many won't or can't believe that all that guilt has been carried away on the cross. And you can observe more than ever the consequences in our world without much imagination. Every slip-up, every sin, and every wrong word must be atoned for. And that's exactly why the evil cycle of revenge and hate never ends. But God doesn't want us to fall into hate and bloodshed. God doesn't want us to die. God doesn't want us to always place the blame on others. We don't even need any of that! Because the cross doesn't only show us the heavy burden of sin, but it also shows us God's good plan for us. The cross also shows us that guilt is conquered! There on Golgotha, God made a new beginning with us people. We don't have to search for a place to dump our guilt anymore! On the cross, we can see how God has always wanted us. We can see that we are beloved children. We can see that there is not a single reason to hate our neighbor! Peace and salvation happen at the cross! And all of this happens in our time! In our life! Amen.