

Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ
Amen.

Our sermon text today is written in the book of Isaiah, starting chapter 52: 13 through to 53:12 and we will be concentrating on chapter 53:4-6.

Let us pray ... Almighty and merciful Father, be with us here today as we gather together to humbly remember the suffering and death of your Son, Jesus Christ; grant that we may look upon the cross and believe. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in Your sight; we pray through Your son, Jesus Christ. Amen

Title God's Suffering Servant

Our sermon text for this morning is simply remarkable; in it we hear what Isaiah saw happen to our Lord with absolute clarity. Isaiah's words in this prophecy leave us with an image of the suffering that Jesus took on for us, and it leaves us more aware of the severity and of the heinous nature of his suffering.

Recently I have been reading a book about crucifixion in the ancient world and the folly of the message of the cross, in it the author calls crucifixion 'a barbaric form of execution of the utmost cruelty' which is attested to by ancient literature that says,

can anyone be found who would prefer wasting away in pain dying limb by limb, or letting out his life drop by drop, rather than expiring once for all? Can any man be found willing to be fastened to the accursed tree, long sickly, already deformed, swelling with ugly weals on shoulders and chest, and drawing the breath of life amid long-drawn-out agony?

Christ's death on the cross was a bloody affair, if you have watched Mel Gibson's 'The Passion of the Christ' you'd probably remember the scenes where he laboriously re-enacts the cruelty of Christ's suffering at the hands of the Roman soldiers, Christ's march as he carries his cross, and His being nailed to the beams of the cross.

As I read the words of Isaiah, Christ's Passion comes to mind, and I still see images of Gibson's film in my head. But these words don't only speak of Christ's Passion; they also speak of Jesus' whole Incarnation. Isaiah says that Jesus *bore our grief and carried our sorrows*. He did this by becoming one of us, and living a normal life.

Our holy God walked among us sinful people as a man and endured sin in ways we cannot. He knows what it is to be human, to endure the difficulties of life, to have family and loved ones die.

He knows what it is like to be tempted, because He was tempted in every way just like we are, but He never gave in. He was offended daily by the sin of those around Him, but He never took part in it Himself. He learned what it is to carry sin as He shouldered the burdens of our sin and bore them through His trial and suffering and then on to the cross.

As we heard in the gospel reading this morning, a crowd had gathered at His trial, and we heard them crying out in one voice. *Crucify him! Crucify him!* The people in the crowd judged Christ as guilty and deserving of death. According to the scribes and the chief priests, Jesus was blasphemous, claiming to be the Son of God. He had a reputation of associating with the less than desirable members of society of that time.

He did not conform to what the people expected the Messiah to be. Their version of the Messiah was a king, who commanded an army, who was going to rid them of their Roman oppressors, who was going to reinstate the glory days of Israel and give them peace. But instead the Messiah came in the form of Jesus Christ, who would challenge their way of life, who would challenge their theology and their religious beliefs; that is why they all cried out *Crucify him! Crucify him!*

In his prophecy Isaiah reminds us that: *We all, 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.* Isaiah's prophesy places us right there in the crowd. Our sinfulness is no different than theirs. Each and every time we sin we join in with their chorus *Crucify him! Crucify him!*

As we worship this morning we are here to celebrate the death of the crucified Christ. How odd does that sound. Normally we mourn deaths, we don't celebrate them! But we celebrate this death, because death has not won, it lost. We celebrate this death for what it accomplished. The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all! By His death, our sins are atoned for, paid for, and forgiven, and for that we should rejoice.

Our reading this morning pulls no punches; this is why our reading is so remarkable; it's right in our faces. ***The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*** We are the cause of this, and we cannot but thank God that He was willing and able to do what He did, that is, redeem us from sin and death and hell even when that redemption comes at such a tremendous cost.

While we celebrate this death, we do so with humility, knowing it is the measure of our sin as much as it is the measure of the love of God. How terrible it is that we have earned this, yet how wonderful it is that God has had compassion on us and has purchased us from our own sin at the price of the death of His own Son in our place.

Crucifixion was a bloody affair, it was cruel and it was barbaric, as much as it was humiliating and shameful for both its victim and their family. Crucifixion was both an instrument of torture and an instrument that would bring fear and loathing into the hearts of those who looked upon the crucified. Even so, our God used this form of death to free all those who can look upon the cross and believe that Christ was crucified for them, that He shed his blood so that they may come to eternal life with him and all the company of heaven.

Therefore we thank God, that on the night He was betrayed Jesus didn't run away from the cross in the garden of Gethsemane. Instead He took it up for you and for me. Jesus Christ endured the suffering of that cross, and on it He gave up His life-giving blood for us.

Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen