

"WOOD"
John 19:16-18

March 13,2013

Lent Service 5

Here is something we see every day: wood. Last week's object – thorns - are very painful. However, wood is very useful. We use wood to build houses, tables, chairs, and other furniture. Many things in our church (are made from) wood: pews, baptismal font, communion rail, the altar, lectern, and pulpit.

Many Bible stories have wood involved in them. For example, God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son, ISAAC, to test Abraham. So, Abraham and Isaac traveled to Mount MORIAH. Abraham needed wood to burn his sacrifice on an altar. When they went up on the mountain, ISAAC had to carry the wood himself that would be used to sacrifice him. At the last minute, God stopped Abraham because Abraham had shown a strong faith. Abraham and Isaac used the wood to burn up a ram on the altar instead.

When the Jewish people were traveling in the desert after leaving Egypt, they rebelled against God and Moses. They complained because of the rough life while traveling in the wilderness. So, God sent poisonous snakes among them to bite them and they died. The people told Moses, "We have sinned against God. Please pray to God to help us." God told Moses, "Make a pole and put a bronze snake on it. Then anyone who looks at it will not die, but live." So, Moses took some wood and made a pole. He took some bronze and made a snake. He put it on the wood pole. All people who looked at it were safe and lived.

Wood was very important in Jesus' life, too. Jesus grew up with His mother, MARY, and stepfather, JOSEPH. His occupation was that of a carpenter. He worked with wood and made things. Joseph also taught that job to Jesus. Jesus learned that occupation and helped Joseph work with wood and make things. Jesus would work side by side with His stepfather to do his will with wood.

But Jesus had another (real) Father - His Heavenly Father. Jesus' Father in heaven also wanted Jesus' involved with wood. It was the will of His Father in heaven for Jesus to die on a cross made of wood. What a difference in the use of wood! Joseph, the stepfather, used wood for good, positive ways - to make things. God the Father used wood to construct a cross and kill His only Son, Jesus. Does that mean Joseph, the stepfather, loved Jesus and God the Father hated Jesus? Of course not. Then, why the cross? It was because God the Father loved you and me more than anything – even if it meant that His Son would have to suffer.

When we do something bad, we deserve punishment. Maybe we don't want punishment. Maybe we don't believe it will happen. And sometimes punishment does not happen. In our world, many people who do wrong escape punishment. Suppose a person is speeding in his car, but the police don't see him or don't catch him. That person escapes punishment. Suppose a person kills someone. He goes to trial, but the JURY finds him "not guilty." That person escapes punishment. Suppose a person robs a bank, goes to jail, but escapes from jail. That person escapes punishment. Suppose a child cheats at school – cheats on a test or homework – but the teacher doesn't see it. That student escapes punishment.

But there is one punishment from which you and I cannot escape: God's punishment. No one in this world can escape God's punishment. God's justice requires punishment for sin. And that will happen. God is almighty and can punish every sinner. But God loved us so much that He didn't want to punish you for your sins and mistakes. So God the Father sent Jesus, His Son, to do that for you. Jesus willingly came. The Father did not force Jesus to go to the cross. I suppose Jesus could have refused, but He willingly went to the cross.

We read about that in our lesson today. Pilate gave up trying to save Jesus and ordered the soldiers to crucify Him. The soldiers led Jesus to the place called GOLGOTHA. Jesus was like Issac. Issac had to carry the wood to kill him, so also Jesus had to carry the wood cross to kill Him. But Isaac escaped death. Jesus did not (escape). When they arrived at GOLGOTHA, the soldiers crucified Jesus.

What wonderful love! God had decided to condemn all sin. Here, on this cross made of wood, it happened. God placed all of our sins upon Jesus and condemned them all through Jesus' death. The soldiers lifted up Jesus on the cross, just as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on the pole in the desert. We are now like the children of Israel long ago. When they were sick because the poisonous snakes bit them, they looked up to the bronze snake on the pole. They were healed. In the same way, we are "sick" because of our sin. When we look up to Jesus hanging on the cross, put our trust in Him, then we become well - all our sins are forgiven. We have peace with God.

But Jesus' work did not end when He died on the cross. Three days later, Jesus defeated death. Jesus left the grave and rose to new life. Now, when we look to the empty tomb in faith, we have new life as well. Death is the punishment for sin. Jesus accepted that punishment and overcame that punishment to live again. That means we overcome death, too. Death cannot hurt us. Our bodies will die, but we will live again. We will rise, just as Jesus rose, and live with Him forever in heaven.

This means we will live differently here and now. We live to follow Jesus in our families, as we go to school, as we work. We, too, have crosses to carry. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after Me, let him say "No" to his wants, take up his cross, and follow Me." This is not a cross (made of) wood. We will not get crucified. Jesus already did that. This is not a cross of punishment. Jesus completed the punishment.

What is this cross then? Jesus means that any person who follows Him will suffer for following Him. People may reject us because we refuse to join in with their sin. People may mock us for living differently and being "religious". People may tease us because we want to worship Jesus more than we want to do other things on Sunday morning. People may laugh at us for using our time and money to support the Lord's work instead of selfishly using them for ourselves just to satisfy our desires. In some countries, people hurt and even kill people because they follow Jesus.

When that happens to you, don't worry. Don't be afraid. Don't be down. But remember this wood (picture) and this cross made of wood. Jesus has defeated Satan and all of his temptations.

Jesus has defeated sin and all of its troubles. These things cannot destroy you. And, when you accept your cross, remember that Jesus is there with you to help you and support you. He makes your cross - your troubles for following Him - lighter. You can follow Him despite the crosses. Following the way of this world leads to temporary fun, but eternal punishment in hell. Following Jesus leads to temporary suffering, but eternal joy and peace in heaven.

So, when you remember our picture for tonight, think about JOSEPH. He used wood to make many fine things because He was a skilled carpenter. Think about God. He, too, is a like a carpenter. He used ordinary wood to make the best thing of all: the cross. There on the cross, Jesus received punishment so that we would receive forgiveness. There on the cross, Jesus received death so that we could receive life. Trust in Jesus and follow Him with your crosses and you will have all the blessings of His cross now and forever. Amen