

Epworth Chapel on the Green
April 3, 2015
Good Friday
Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Isaiah 52:13-53:12
Psalm 22:1-11
Hebrews 10:1-25
John 19:1-37

As I did last night, tonight I ask once again: *Why are we here?*

The answer to that question is: We are here because we are part of a tradition. A tradition that claims that these are three of the most important days in all of history.

But why are we here *tonight*, on this Good Friday?

The simple answer to that question is this: ***We are here because we are part of a tradition that is shaped by the Cross of Jesus Christ.***

Let me be more specific about what this means. For many people, the Cross is treated as a factor in a mathematical equation that shows how we are saved from sin. That's alright, I suppose, as far as it goes. But that's not what I mean when I say that we are part of a tradition that is shaped by the Cross.

When I say that we are part of a tradition that is shaped by the Cross, I mean to say **that it is in the Cross of Christ that we most clearly see the truth about how God is revealed in the world.** The Cross reveals to us that God chooses to redeem the world's brokenness and pain by *taking it unto Himself*. The Almighty, All-powerful One chooses the path of suffering love.

In his book entitled *Night*, Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel tells the story of the hanging of three men by the Nazi's in a concentration camp. The typical practice was that as prisoners were hanged, all of those in the camp were forced to walk by and look at the victims. The story is told by one of the prisoners, a man named Eliezer. The situation is particularly gut-wrenching for him because one of the men being hanged is a 13 year old boy:

One day when we came back from work, we saw three gallows rearing up in the assembly place, three black crows. Roll call. SS all around us, machine guns trained: the traditional ceremony. Three victims in chains—and one of them, the little servant, the sad-eyed angel.

The SS seemed more preoccupied, more disturbed than usual. To hang a young boy in front of thousands of spectators was no light matter. The head of the camp read the verdict. All eyes were on the child. He was lividly pale, almost calm, biting his lips. The gallows threw its shadow over him.

This time the Lagerkapo refused to act as executioner. Three SS replaced him.

The three victims mounted together onto the chairs.

The three necks were placed at the same moment within the nooses.

“Long live liberty!” cried the two adults.

But the child was silent.

“Where is God? Where is He?” someone behind me asked.

At a sign from the head of the camp, the three chairs tipped over.

Total silence throughout the camp. On the horizon, the sun was setting.

“Bare your heads!” yelled the head of the camp. His voice was raucous. We were weeping.

Then the march past began. The two adults were no longer alive. Their tongues hung swollen, blue-tinged. But the third rope was still moving; being so light, the child was still alive...

For more than half an hour he stayed there, struggling between life and death, dying in slow agony under our eyes. And we had to look him full in the face. He was still alive when I passed in front of him. His tongue was red, his eyes were not yet glazed.

Behind me, I heard the same man asking:

“Where is God now? Where is God now?”

And I heard a voice within me answer him:

“Where is He? Here He is—He is hanging here on this

gallows ...” [Excerpt from *Night* by Elie Wiesel in Jon Pahl’s book *Shopping Malls and Other Sacred Spaces: Putting God in Place* (2003), p 36.]

Why are we here tonight? We are here tonight because we are part of a tradition that is shaped by the Cross. We are a people of that Cross. It is through that Cross that God is most fully revealed in the world. It is our only hope. It is our only boast. It is the only hope for our world.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.