

WEEKLY DEVOTION – Tuesday, February 27, 2024
Pastor Bruce Kischnick, Grace Lutheran Church, New Albany, IN

“The Word Informs the Faith”

READINGS: John 19:32-35 – The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, then those of the other. But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. The man who saw it has given testimony and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe.

Mark 15:42-47 It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body. Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus saw where he was laid.

On the first Sunday of Lent I preached on the Old Testament text for that day, “The Binding of Isaac” (or as you may better know it, “The Sacrifice of Isaac”). In that sermon I maintained that you cannot understand that story in its original context and setting without seeing the picture God is painting, not of Abraham and Isaac, but of Himself and his Son, his only Son, Jesus. Abraham was not required in the end to sacrifice his son, his only son, because “God himself will provide the lamb” – “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” I also talked about a PBS program from 1996 that featured “scholars” from Jewish, Muslim, and Christian backgrounds who discussed the story and its possible meanings. I expressed my disappointment and disgust at the failure of any one of the three “Christian experts” to even mention Jesus in regards to this story. Just because they have a prestigious doctorate in “Biblical Studies” does not mean such people have faith. Unless they see the Bible as the actual Word of God, they will fail every time to truly believe what that Word tells us.

I’m currently reading a theological study called “The Resurrection of Jesus” by Dr. Michael R. Licona. He does a very careful study of all the Biblical and Extra-Biblical sources that pertain to the Easter story. He also takes a very careful look at numerous studies done by other scholars, especially the atheist, sceptic, non-Christian, and avowedly unbelieving ones. In discussing what he titles “The Historical Bedrock” of the Resurrection event, facts that the vast majority of scholars accept as absolutely true, he points to the certainty that Jesus of Nazareth died by crucifixion. He was most certainly dead when the Romans had finished with him.

Still, there is one named Barbara Thiering who suggests this scenario by which Jesus only “appeared to be dead”: “drink was brought, of ‘vinegar’, wine that had been spoiled....It was snake poison, taking a number of hours to act. But its first effect, together with that of the trauma he had suffered, was to render him unconscious....Jesus did not die on the cross. He recovered from the effects of the poison, was helped to escape from the tomb by friends, and stayed with them until he [recovered].” Further the help he received was in the form of about 100 pounds of myrrh and aloe. The juice from the aloe was administered to Jesus as a “purgative” to drive out the snake poison, and the myrrh acted as a “soothing ingredient” to help heal his wounds.

Did you get that? Snake poison and purgatives! She gave no evidence whatsoever for her hypothesis. Pure speculation and full unbelief! The Scriptures give us the most straight forward and consistent explanation

for all that happened in our Lord's Passion. If one believes there is a God who interacts with his human creatures, then every testimony and every detail in the text stands plausible and believable. The Word informs the Faith, and the faith of the Church becomes our faith, built on God's words, actions, prophecies, and fulfillments over the millennia since he first breathed the breath of life into Adam's nostrils. If one does NOT believe there is such a God, then any other explanation, no matter how speculative and far-fetched, has as much weight as do the Evangelists.

You and I have sources for all we believe to be true about Jesus. Those sources can stand up to any scrutiny and are not diminished by the unbelief and attacks made by "the wise and the learned". God's word is our treasure and the only source of faith and doctrine. It is the "bedrock" of our hope In Christ Jesus. The Old Testament is found in the New, and the New Testament is found in the Old: same story of salvation, same God who calls us to trust him. The Word informs the Faith, and the Faith informs our hearts. Thanks be to God. Amen.

PRAYER:

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

1) LENTEN SERVICES are being offered every Wednesday. Services start at 7:00 PM. Our overall theme is "The Forgiveness Challenge" and the pastors are interviewing various Biblical characters whose lives or stories teach us important truths about the forgiveness of God and the forgiveness we can give to one another. This week Saul/Paul visits us.

2) The SUGARBUSH MAPLE SYRUP FESTIVAL takes place near Salem again this Saturday and Sunday, March 2-3. Grace will once again be serving breakfast and lunch both days. We'll need LOTS of help, so if you are able, sign up soon.