



Easter Meditation

Central Presbyterian Church

Pine Bluff, AR

1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Good Friday

March 29, 2013

Enter in silence, worship in silence, leave in silence.

"Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Philippians 2: 5 - 11

As you begin your meditation pray this or another prayer to acknowledge God's presence and your need for God's presence:

"Merciful God, you gave your Son to suffer the shame of the cross. Save me from hardness of heart, that, seeing him who died for us all, I may repent, confess my sin, and receive your overflowing love, in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

Read to yourself the words of "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded," Hymn #98.

Read the "Servant Song" from Isaiah, a passage written almost 600 years before the time of Christ which helped early Christians see Jesus' sufferings in light of the sufferings of the Hebrew people:

"See, my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high. Just as there were many who were astonished at him – so marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of mortals – so he shall startle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which had not been told them they shall see, and that which they had not heard they shall contemplate.

Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For 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, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account.

Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future? For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people. They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him with pain. When you make his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the LORD shall prosper. Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Read also Psalm 22, an ancient poem which sounds so much like Jesus' trial and crucifixion, and which he quoted from the cross:

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest.

Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. To you they cried, and were saved; in you they trusted, and were not put to shame. But I am a worm, and not human; scorned by others, and despised by the people. All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads; "Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver – let him rescue the one in whom he delights!"

Yet it was you who took me from the womb; you kept me safe on my mother's breast. On you I was cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me you have been my God. Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help. Many bulls encircle me, strong bulls of Bashan surround me; they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is

melted within my breast; my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death. For dogs are all around me; a company of evildoers encircles me. My hands and feet have shriveled; I can count all my bones. They stare and gloat over me; they divide my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.

But you, O LORD, do not be far away! O my help, come quickly to my aid! Deliver my soul from the sword, my life from the power of the dog! Save me from the mouth of the lion! From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me. I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:

You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him; stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel! For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him. From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him. The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD. May your hearts live forever! All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him. For dominion belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations. To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him. Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord, and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it."

Psalm 22

The story of the events of Jesus' crucifixion are recorded in John 18: 1 through 19: 42. Read the following account of his arrest in verses 1 - 12 or look up the whole passage in the pew Bible and read it.

"After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus

often met there with his disciples. So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons.

Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, 'Whom are you looking for?' They answered, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus replied, 'I am he.' Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, 'I am he,' they stepped back and fell to the ground.

Again he asked them, 'Whom are you looking for?' And they said, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus answered, 'I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go.' This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, 'I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me.'

Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, 'Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?' So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him."

John 18: 1 - 12

On this day of prayer and reflection give thanks to God for the love which binds us together. Pray also for:

- ▶ all nations and peoples of the earth and for those in authority among them;
- ▶ for President Obama, members of the Congress and Supreme Court, and for all those elected to serve the common good;
- ▶ all who suffer and are afflicted in body or in mind;
- ▶ all the hungry and homeless, the destitute and the oppressed, and all who suffer persecution, doubt, and despair;
- ▶ the sorrowful and bereaved;
- ▶ prisoners and captives;
- ▶ those in mortal danger.

Pray that God will comfort and relieve them and grant them the knowledge of God's love, and stir up in us all the will and the patience to minister to their needs. Pray as well for those:

- ▶ who have not received the gospel of Christ;
- ▶ who have not heard the words of salvation;
- ▶ who have lost their faith;
- ▶ whose sin has made them indifferent to Christ;
- ▶ who actively oppose Christ by word or deed;
- ▶ who are enemies of the cross of Christ, and persecutors of his disciples;
- ▶ for all who in the name of Christ have persecuted others.

Pray that God will open their hearts to the truth and lead them to faith and obedience.

Pray this prayer:

Almighty God, look with mercy on your family for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed, to be given over to the hands of sinners, and to suffer death on the cross. Hear all my prayers in the name of Jesus, who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Remain as long as you like. Leave in silence, confident that today's worship will continue on Easter Sunday.