

April 5, 2020
Phil. 2:6-8
"A Humbling Experience"

On a visit to the Beethoven museum in Bonn, a young American student became fascinated by the piano on which Beethoven had composed some of his greatest works.

She asked the museum guard if she could play a few bars on it; she accompanied the request with a lavish tip, and the guard agreed. The girl went to the piano and tinkled out the opening of the Moonlight Sonata.

As she was leaving she said to the guard, "I suppose all the great pianists who come here want to play on that piano." The guard shook his head. "Padarewski (the famed Polish pianist) was here a few years ago and he said he wasn't worthy to touch it."

As I read Luke's account of the events of Jesus' last hours and then his death during the midweek Lenten services and then again this morning I had that same feeling as the Polish pianist, Padarewski who felt that he was totally unworthy of even touching, let alone playing, the piano of so great a master like Beethoven.

As we read the Passion account we are led to ask, "Why should Jesus do all this for me? I'm not worthy of all the suffering, the humiliation, the beatings and then the torturous dying that Jesus underwent.

He didn't suffer because of anything he had done, but he went through all this because of me. What have I done to deserve so much love, so much sacrifice? How is it possible for one person to go through so much and give so much to another?"

What the Gospel writers tell us about Jesus' death is not just a piece of history, like the stuff you find in books about inspirational people, famous politicians, legendary explorers, amazing sports heroes and scientific and literary geniuses.

The history books are even full of famous people, some of whom even sacrificed their lives. But somehow Jesus' death is different.

As we read about what happened to Jesus, we are reading more than a piece of history; we are reading the story of how God sacrificed his own Son because of his great love for all humanity.

What hits us the most is that He did it even though the people of this planet don't deserve it. If we look at our world today, we see many examples of how people take advantage of others, not showing the kind of love that is needed and simply living very selfishly.

As we read the Gospel story of Jesus, we begin to realize that He did all this, even though the vast majority of our planet may ignore God or openly reject him, regarding all this Easter stuff as some fairy tale.

It's just amazing that God hasn't done what he did to the world at the time of Noah – wipe out everyone except Noah and his family. And this is where God's love for us becomes so amazing. Instead of acting in judgement as we would expect him to, the all-powerful God got off his throne, rolled up his sleeves and came to earth as a human.

Imagine the president of a company, giving up his office with a view, his personal secretary, the reserved parking place, the salary and perks and benefits, and putting on cleaner's overalls to sweep floors and scrub toilets.

Imagine Bill Gates, one of the richest men in the world, stepping down from Microsoft to become a sewer worker. Imagine those scenarios and you still will not come close to the self-emptying of the Son of God when he stepped down from his heavenly throne to save us.

He traded his throne and all his power for a Virgin's womb, a stable and a manger crib, a borrowed donkey that carried him into Jerusalem, a rough Roman cross on which he died, a borrowed tomb. He took on our humanity, our flesh and blood. The Lord of all became the carpenter from Nazareth. The preacher from Galilee. The man on a cross.

The Bible says, "*The wages of sin is death,*" and "*the soul that sins will die*" - death is the result of sinfulness - that's what God should have done.

But instead the man whom Pilate declared to be innocent three times is sentenced to death and Barabbas, the murderer, goes free. God is hung on a cross between two common criminals. This is how far God will go to save you. This is the extreme measure that God takes because of his love for you and me.

Knowing fully what was in store for him in Jerusalem, nevertheless He rode on into Jerusalem amid the shouts of "Hosanna". He submitted to injustice, to mockery, to beating.

He permitted himself to be crucified. He prayed for those who drove the nails into his body and for all of us who are responsible for his death. This is the depth of God's love, his commitment, his passion to make you his own, to free you from sin and death.

A story is told of an owner of a beautiful hunting lodge in Scotland who invited some of his friends to spend the weekend there. In their reveling and partying, one of the guests opened a bottle of champagne and it shot out onto a wall.

It left an ugly blotch. All through the rest of the weekend, the guests watched that blotch dry into an ugly stain. The owner was very disturbed, very angry, and he let his guests know it.

When the weekend was over, they all started home, except for one of the guests who stayed behind. He kept staring at that stain on the wall and he took some charcoal out and started sketching around that stain. He turned the brown stain into some brown highland rocks. Then he painted a stream that splashed its water over the rocks.

At the darkest edge of the stain he put a leaping stag. In the background he painted some pursuing hunters. Whenever people look at the wall today they no longer see the stain but instead a beautiful painting by Sir Edward Henry Landseer, a famous British artist.

That's how it is with God. Jesus' death on the cross has covered over the terrible blotch that sin makes on our lives. Just as visitors can no longer see the blotch when they looked at the wall, God no longer sees the blotch of sin in our lives.

Instead, he sees someone who is forgiven and renewed. He sees someone for whom Jesus has died. He isn't angry or repulsed by our sin, instead he sees someone whom he loves.

Today marks the beginning of Holy Week. This week we will remember again the depth of God's commitment to us as we hear again what Jesus did to free us from the consequences of our sin. Today in spite of all that is going on around the world and in our own lives...

It is humbling to be loved like this?

To be loved to death by God?

To be died for by God's Son?

It bows the head. It bends the knee. It is the end of all self-justifying.

To be loved like this gives us a new sense of our own worth.

It causes us not only to wonder at how wonderful and amazing God's love is for us but stirs within us the desire to now truly live up to our status as one of God's children.

God's Spirit within us calls us to a deeper faith, an unshakeable trust in Jesus as our Saviour and helper at all times, and a commitment to serve him as He has so graciously served us through his suffering and dying.

The story of Jesus is not just some dusty old history that we nod our heads at in wonder. This is a story of life and death – our life and death. Jesus came to give us life forever.

Praise be to God's name - and to the name of his Son, Christ Jesus, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Amen.

May He grant you the peace to endure these next few days and weeks as we see evidence of a world standing on sand ready to crumble and yet you and me are standing on the rock of ages, a foundation that will never falter and that which will stand the storms and trials of this life. The Lord is our Rock! Trust in Him!