

“The Lamb of Salvation”

Isaiah 53:6-12

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In the second half of Isaiah’s song of the Suffering Servant, we see the response of the Servant to His harsh treatment, and the result of His being put through such deep anguish. He has been stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted, pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, and chastised and wounded by the world. Or, so it would seem. Even in the knowledge of the truth of Christ, we cannot escape the reality that it is our sin that has placed our Lord upon the cross. We are wandering sheep who are full of imperfections and utterly incapable of making the sacrifice necessary to redeem us of our sin. But as Isaiah has shown us in verse 11, the Servant, Jesus Christ, will bear our iniquities and make many to be accounted righteous. Our being imperfect sheep that go astray is contrasted with the fact that He is the perfect Lamb of salvation.

Isaiah begins in verse 6 with a confession of sins, confessing the reality of our original sin which begets nothing but things which are contrary to God’s holiness and righteousness. Every one of us has turned his own way, walking in the idolatry of self-love and preservation based upon what is best for us. We are sheep who have gone astray to live a life of sin, rather than a life of righteousness for the sake of the One who has borne our grief and shame. But the next part of that verse is the key. Yes, we are sinners, and we have wandered away from the righteous decrees of our God, and we are in desperate need of being brought back to the path of righteousness. But there is absolutely no ability for us to do that on our own.

We pray that we might confess our sins with repentant hearts, but that repentance is not what lays those sins upon Jesus. “The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” Not praying hard enough; not doing enough acts of penance and atonement; not letting Jesus into your heart so He can clear your conscience. Iniquities that belong to us, along with their punishment, were laid upon Christ by God as He hung upon the cross. Our sinful flesh doesn’t want to let go of those sins. It wants to hold onto them as long as possible and make us seek more to continue feeding its depraved desires. And that is something we give into all too often.

In the shadow of the cross where our Lord Jesus was oppressed and afflicted for our iniquities, we constantly open our mouths to justify what we have done and what we have not done. And yet, as He hung there for us, bearing the full weight of our sins, He “opened not His mouth.” There was no justification for what He bore, no making light of

the sins which He willingly took upon Himself. They were valid and punishable to the fullest extent of the Law. So, the Lord, in His great mercy, led Him like a lamb to the slaughter—as a sheep to its shearers—and He did it in silence as He accepted the guilty verdict as the just act of His Father’s will.

There was no deceit in Him, and no violent act for which He should be condemned. But just as a lamb obeys its shepherd, the Son obeys His Father. Consider the contrast between these two references to sheep and lambs. We as sinful, defiled sheep wander around, going astray from our Shepherd at every turn in order to defile ourselves further. The Servant, as the perfect, undefiled Lamb of salvation, goes willingly to His punishment for defilements that are not His. He doesn’t seek a way out or to connive His way into freedom, even though the people who condemned Him to death by crucifixion never considered the true reason for which it was happening.

And even though He was innocent and perfect in every respect, “it was the will of the Lord to crush Him.” His death is no mere accident. It is simultaneously an act of His generation and a righteous act of God. God did not coerce them into crucifying His Son, but He allowed them to put Jesus to death. As was revealed to John in Revelation 13:8, “All who dwell on the earth will worship [the beast], whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” God foreknew it all the way down to the last detail, from John the Baptist’s proclamation of “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” to Jesus’ words on the cross, “It is finished.” It is God in His salvific rule that has put Him to grief, and through such grief and the crushing of our Savior, His offspring shall come forth.

We, the Church, are His offspring. We come forth from the blood of Jesus that has redeemed us, and it is by that blood that He has declared us righteous. “The will of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.” By the blood of Jesus, the Lord’s will that all would be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth will go forth from His offspring the Church. Through her proclamation of the Gospel and the right administration of His holy Sacraments, the Lord’s will shall indeed prosper. Out of His anguish comes joy, light, and life, and by His wounds, many shall be counted righteous. And that is all because of His all-atoning sacrifice, and nothing of our own. The Lord shall count us righteous for the sake of His Suffering Servant and for no other reason.

As He bears our iniquities to the cross, Jesus does it not for Himself. He does it so that His Father would be glorified in Him, and we would have eternal life in Him. He has divided the spoil among us in the free gift of forgiveness of sins which He showers upon us as His holy people. Not because of our holiness or because we will it unto ourselves.

But because of His holiness, and His will to give it to us without merit. He poured His soul out to death, willingly giving up His last breath so that we might be saved from death's strong bands. This is possible because of who He is, and not because of who we are. We are poor, miserable sinners, and He is the perfect and righteous Son of the living God.

Yet, He “was numbered with the transgressors.” When He went to Calvary, He stood side by side with all of us as those who are guilty of sin. As we discussed last week, He intimately knows our grief and shame. He knows the weight our sins bear down upon us because He carried our sorrow to the tree of His shame that we would be rescued from that awful fate. He was numbered among us as one who was guilty of transgressing the Law, though He had not lifted a finger against His Father in heaven. He bore the sin of many, bearing the sins of the whole world upon His shoulders. And that intercession which He made for us at the cross has not ended.

Even now He intercedes on our behalf as we continually make transgression against God. His sacrifice is once for all, but not a one-time thing in the sense that it wiped out everything before it and then the rest of it you have to deal with on your own. Jesus' death upon the cross was once for all sufficient, down to the last sin of the last person before the end of time. For those who are in the faith, the benefit of that sacrifice is applied to us over and over again as Christ intercedes in the Father's courtroom. And over and over again, the Father declares His verdict that we are justified for the sake of His Son who intercedes before Him.

The Lamb of salvation has gone to the cross to bear our sins and be our Savior. He has done all that is necessary for us as those who are helpless and incapable of atoning for our own sins. We come before Him in humble repentance, knowing that for the sake of Jesus and by His blood we have been given the treasured gift of forgiveness that has brought life and salvation to all who believe in Him. In the light of His glory which shines forth from the cross where He is glorified, we look forward to the light of the tomb when He will rise from the dead in victory—a victory which is ours by faith, and points us to the final victory when we too are raised from the dead to dwell in His presence for all eternity. Amen.