

Good Friday – April 7, 2023

Text: Isaiah 53:6-7

Theme: "Murderous Sheep...Silent Lamb"

⁶All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned every one to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

⁷He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he opened not his mouth.

The hardest thing I have ever had to do as an earthly father was to tell my boys no. When I was a child, it never seemed to bother my father in the least to say no. He said no to lots of things. No to toys I wanted. No to going places with friends. No to a car I desperately wanted when I was 16. Sometimes his no's were connected to what he could afford. Sometimes his no's were because he didn't think it was a good idea. Sometimes his no's had no apparent reason and little if any explanation. But I never imagined as a child that saying no to me caused him any pain. How can you know how hard it is to say no to your child until you have to do it?

When Noah looked at me with those big brown eyes and said pleeeeeeease Dad, it was so hard to say no – even if I understood that the request was completely ridiculous. When Neal looked at me in the doctor's office as the nurse with the needle approached and his eyes seemed to say – "You're going to stop her from sticking that

thing into me right Dad?" It was so hard to say no, even though I understood that it was ultimately good for him.

I think back to Abraham leading Isaac up to that mountain top where he was to sacrifice his son. I imagine Isaac's wide eyes as he asked – "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Knowing how hard it is just to say no to my sons, I cannot fathom the anguish that Abraham felt when he knew that he would soon have to tell his son that he was to be the sacrifice, and not only that, but that Abraham would have to kill him. I am certain that it was the hardest thing Abraham ever had to do. But at the last minute, God spared Isaac and provided the Lamb.

Today is our remembrance of what must surely have been a most horrible day for our Father in heaven. Can you imagine the pain of sending your son to the cross? And then, not only the cross, but to Hell. Imagine your son calling out to you for help, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" – and you know full well that you could help him if you wished. Then, instead of helping him, you turn your back on him...forsake him. We always remember on Good Friday the pain of the cross that Jesus suffered for us, but tonight – remember also the pain the Father felt as His created children turned against Him and murdered His only begotten Son.

We are the murderous sheep who turned on their shepherd and killed him. We are the tenants of the vineyard who killed the heir. Yes, our Father knew from the beginning that this is what would happen, but knowing what will happen does not lessen the pain when it happens. Knowing that sooner or later a boy would come along and break your daughter's heart did not make it any easier for you to bear. Knowing that no one lives forever did not mitigate the pain when your spouse or parent or sibling died. And knowing that we would beat His son until His back was nothing but bloody ribbons of flesh did not make it easier for the Father to remain still in heaven. Knowing that we would parade Him through the streets like a carnival freak did not make it any easier for the Father to watch. And knowing that He would cry out for help from Him from the cross did not make it any easier for our Father to turn His back and forsake His only begotten Son.

And so, the silent Lamb died on this night. Not because those people were so evil back in Jesus' time, but because all people are so evil in all times. You and I are just as murderous as the sheep in the days our shepherd walked this earth. As a parent, what hurts more, when your child makes a poor choice out of ignorance or when your child makes a poor choice knowing full well that it will hurt you? What hurts more? The silly unthinking things that children say to

their parents or the intentionally mean things? Nothing hurts a parent more than when a child makes a choice that he knows will cause pain for the parent and the child doesn't seem to care.

You think that's awful? Are you thinking "what a horrible child – my children would never...or I would never...!" Don't be so sure. You do it every day to your Heavenly Father. The last time you chose to sin, you spat directly into his face. The last time you chose to push him aside to make room for something else or someone else you twisted the knife in his heart. He gave everything for us – even the life of His only son. So, when we make a choice to sin – we cause our Father pain. We are just as painful to him as the murderous sheep who put their shepherd on the cross. In fact, we are worse. We have seen the sacrifice He made for us and still we choose to live self-centered, pleasure-seeking, worldly lives.

We are murderous sheep. We are scarlet with the blood of our Savior who we daily attack and defame. But He was silent at His slaughter. He moved through Pilate's Kangaroo court. He endured His beating. He bore His cross. And He was damned. And He did all of this to save the very murderous sheep who had risen up against Him. Then He rose from the dead.

We stand in awe as He steps out of the tomb and wraps us up in His cloak of righteousness. Though we were scarlet with sin, now all the scarlet is gone and we find ourselves forgiven. We stand in awe at the foot of the cross wondering what kind of holy love might motivate Him to do this for us. We travel again through His last moments on earth, listening to His last words from the cross. We search for a clue. Some word. Some action that would indicate to us what we have done to deserve such a sacrifice. But we search in vain. It will not be there. What we learn again tonight is that we did nothing to deserve what He did for us. What we see tonight...again...is the remarkable love that poured from our Savior as his life was slowly snuffed out.

We leave this place tonight shamed by our choices and remorseful for our sin...but...we leave forgiven. We killed our shepherd. But our Father has forgiven us and by His death we are forgiven of every sin. Then, on the third day we will return to celebrate His victory over death and the grave and therefore our victory. But not yet tonight. Tonight, we stand at the foot of the cross...we listen... and we pray... and we remember the monstrous pain we caused our Father the night He forsook his son for our sake.