

John 18:1-19:42 (Good Friday)
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
April 15, 2022

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour (Matt 27:45).

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

“Tenebrae,” the name of the evening service on Good Friday, is the Latin word for “darkness.” In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. Tenebrae was over the abyss. On the first day of creation, God created light and separated night from day, light from darkness. In the Gospel of John, Jesus often refers to Himself as the light. He says: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). Again, Jesus says: “Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.” (John 11:9-10). Jesus is the light. Without Jesus, we grope around in the darkness and fall over ourselves as we try to find the way.

During the service of Tenebrae, the service of darkness, we extinguish one candle at a time. The seven candles snuffed out represent at least two things: the snuffing out of Christ’s life and the three hours of darkness as Jesus hung on the cross. From the betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane, which Jesus called “the power of darkness,” (Luke 22:53) to His trials, from the scourging and whipping to hanging on the cross and breathing His last, our Lord’s Passion, His suffering and death, was a gradual snuffing out of our Lord’s life. The darkness was overcoming the light. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men . . . The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through

Him, yet the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. Jesus came into this dark world as the light of the world, but the world did not receive Him. The light of the world was snuffed out like the seven candles on the altar. The light dims until it is no more.

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour (Matt 27:45). The darkness that covered the land as the light of the world was snuffed out is only a faint image of the darkness of evil. As we heard earlier this Holy Week with Luther's *Meditation on the Passion of Christ*, we are sometimes tempted to blame others for the darkness. We can point our fingers at the Jews, or at the Romans, or at Judas. We can accuse unbelievers, heretics, and schismatics. But passing the blame is not the point of Good Friday. No, on this day we recognize that it is the darkness within us, our own sin, that snuffed out the life of our LORD. As Isaiah 53 prophesied: "He was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His stripes we are healed . . . the LORD laid on Him the iniquity of us all." It is our sins that betray Jesus, our iniquities that lacerate His flesh, our transgressions that pierce His hands and His feet. We were dwelling in darkness and the darkness within all of us snuffed out the life of Jesus Christ, the light of the world.

What does it mean to dwell in darkness or to have darkness inside of us? In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says: "If the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness" (Matt 6:23). We may think we are living as good people, but if we are not living according to the light of God's Word then we are walking a dark road. We become blinded to what God expects of us and instead allow ourselves to be guided by our own reason or emotions. We live in a delusion of self-imposed order, but without the light of Christ we are actually surrounded by chaos. We stand

right at the precipice of the abyss, not realizing how close we are to destruction. If we are guided by anything but God's Word, we walk in darkness and do not know where we are going (John 12:35). We imagine ourselves to be on the right path, but we are actually headed in the opposite direction.

Sin is such a darkness, such a delusion. Those who killed our LORD either imagined they were doing the right thing, or they didn't think much of it at all. How similar it is with our own sin! We abuse the forgiveness won for us or make light of our transgressions. We tend to brush aside our iniquities rather than confess them. We think we're doing the right thing, or we don't think much of it at all. Yet tonight, on Good Friday, we behold the power of the darkness within. We learn the true nature of our sin by seeing its result: the light of the world is snuffed out, and we are the ones doing it.

But that is not the end. The light of Christ continues shining in the darkness; the darkness has not overcome it. Jesus Christ is the light of the world, the light no darkness can overcome, not even the darkness within us. The candles are snuffed out but the Christ candle remains lit. It disappears for a moment, but then it returns. We know the end of the story. When Jesus died on the cross, it appeared as though the darkness won. But in the end the light triumphs. Jesus rises from the dead. The light of the world is not extinguished, but swallows up the darkness in victory - swallows up *our* darkness in victory. In Holy Baptism Jesus transfers us from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light (Eph 5:8; Col 1:13). We'll see that tomorrow evening at Easter Vigil. By the power of the Holy Spirit given us in our baptisms, we continue fighting against the darkness, in the world and in ourselves. We wrestle "against the cosmic powers over this present darkness" (Eph 6:12), not with weapons of this world, but with the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. We no longer grope around in the darkness of

sin. The way is illuminated by the light of God's Word, by Jesus, the light of the world, the light no darkness can overcome. The way is illuminated as we make our way towards the new heavens and the new earth, to the city where there is no more darkness, where there "is no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the lamb" (Rev 21:23). In the name of Jesus. Amen.