

John 19:30
Good Friday (Tenebrae)
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
April 7, 2023

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

Jesus said, "It is finished," and He bowed His head and gave up His spirit. John 19:30.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

Ever since the Age of Reason in the 1700s, the Age of Enlightenment, as it's called, collective doubt in the goodness of God has increased. Collective doubt about whether or not God even exists has increased. The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche popularized the idea that this loss of God in culture is the death of God. Nietzsche told the parable of a madman who ran into the market place with a lit lantern one morning, crying "I am looking for God! I am looking for God!" Many of those standing around didn't believe in God, so they laughed and asked the man: "Have you lost him? Is He traveling?" The madman cried out "Where has God gone? I shall tell you. We have killed him - you and I. We are his murderers . . . God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we, murderers of all murderers, console ourselves? That which was the holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet possessed has bled to death under our knives. Who will wipe this blood off us?" In Nietzsche's parable, the madman trembles at the loss of God. We tremble at the loss of God, we tremble at the death of God in our culture and wonder what to do next.

When Nietzsche uttered that phrase "God is dead" in the late 1800s, he said out loud what so much of philosophy and religion had been already thinking since the so-called Enlightenment. Nietzsche also paved the way for philosophy and religion into the 20th and 21st centuries. On Good Friday 1966, Time magazine posed the controversial question, on the cover

in red letters against a black backdrop: IS GOD DEAD? The most common answer since Nietzsche has been “Yes, God is dead, the idea of God is irrelevant. We’ll find meaning in other places.” People have become used to living as practical atheists. But then come brief moments of wanton destruction when people sense that something has been lost, that God is lost; moments where people tremble because they realize that, at least to most people, God is dead.

So how do Christians answer that question: “IS GOD DEAD?” The answer might surprise you. Like the madman in Nietzsche’s parable, we Christians also say: “God is dead and we have killed Him.” You see, Friedrich Nietzsche was the son of a Lutheran pastor. He knew the Good Friday hymn “O Darkest Woe,” which will be our final hymn tonight. We sing in verse two: “O sorrow dread! Our God is dead, Upon the cross extended.” And verse three: “O child of woe: Who struck the blow that killed our gracious Master? ‘It is I,’ thy conscience cries, ‘I have wrought disaster!’” We might as well sing what the madman in Nietzsche’s parable says: “God is dead and we have killed Him!” These are words that can make a person tremble: “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” Yes, we are the ones who crucified our Lord with our sins. “Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree?” Yes, our sins nailed him to the tree of the cross. We’re the ones who did it. That which was the holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet possessed has bled to death under our knives. And sometimes it causes us to tremble. Why does it cause us to tremble? Because we did it. The immediate cause of Jesus’s death may have been the Jewish authorities, or the Roman soldiers, but on Good Friday we consider our involvement in the death of God. We sing: “I also and my sin wrought Your deep affliction; this indeed the cause has been of your crucifixion.” God is dead and we have killed Him.

“But how can God die?” you might ask. When Nietzsche said “God is dead,” he meant it in a different sense than we do. We don’t mean that God is dead to us; we mean that God died for us. God became man in Jesus Christ so that He could die for us. God cannot die; but if God is a man, then He can die. And that’s what He did. No sacrifice of ours is able to satisfy God’s wrath towards sin. Not our money, not our time, not our good works or our love, not our faith, not our decision or choice. None of these things is able to make sinful people holy in the sight of the holy God. Not even our own death could satisfy the justice of our just God. The wages of sin is death; but our own death could not repay the damage caused by our sin. Can a murderer really do anything to repay what he has taken from his victim? The answer is no. Can a multi-murderer do anything to repay what he has taken from many victims? Not a chance. So how shall we, murderers of all murderers, console ourselves? That which was the holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet possessed, God in the flesh, has bled to death under our knives. Who will wipe this blood off us? All we can do is tremble at the thought.

But God in His great love and mercy became man so that He could die in our place on the cross. God became man in Jesus Christ so that He who knew no sin, could become sin for us. We can’t wipe the blood off of us, but without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. God became man so that He could redeem us with His own blood. What we meant for evil, God meant for good; for our good. Because in the death of Christ Jesus, the death of God, God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting our trespasses and sins against us. We are now covered in the blood of Jesus; not as guilty murderers but as forgiven sinners. The blood of Jesus, the blood of God, cleanses us from all sin.

In the eyes of the world, God is either dead or might as well be dead. The idea of God is irrelevant and we can get by on our own, so they think. As a society in general we lack the piety

of our ancestors. We lack an awareness of God in our everyday lives. The world can agree with Nietzsche: God is dead and we have killed him. And as Christians, we too, know that God is dead. He died on a cross 2,000 years ago to pay for the sins of the whole world. And the earth trembled. Yet even as we consider tonight that God is dead we keep in mind that He doesn't remain dead. Jesus Christ, our Lord and our God, rose from the dead on Easter morning. Jesus Christ, our Lord and our God, lives and reigns to all eternity and we too will join Him, having been made holy by His blood.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.