



“... he would not drink it”

Good Friday Message by Rev. Dr Yonas Yigezu Dibisa

The background of a Good Friday Message is the inescapable question: What is it that makes Good Friday *good*? For Christians, this particular Friday is a label of the darkest image of the climax of human suffering, featuring the most despicable cruelty committed in human history. However, it is also a significant chapter toward the eternal victory revealed in the resurrection event.

Our Lord Jesus Christ willingly suffered crucifixion and death, a foretaste to his resurrection. He was committed to endure all the deeply hurting pain on the cross in order to fulfil the Father’s eternal will. His adversaries’ mockery hit its peak when “they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall.” Indeed, in such a state of anguish, he would have taken at least a sip of the wine, “but when he tasted it, he would not drink it (Mt. 27:34).” Jesus’ adversaries, had corrupted the natural good wine, treating it with bitter and poisonous substance meant to numb the pain. Yet Jesus, the innocent sufferer, aware of the offering meant to detach him from enduring the pain of being crucified, refused to be treated like a criminal. If Jesus had allowed numbness to take effect, he would not have been able to announce the fulfillment of God’s eternal plan for the salvation of the world. Immediately before his last breath, Jesus declared the accomplishment of his earthly mission--“It is finished (Jn 19:30).”

By bearing the pains of the cross in his body, Jesus consciously and willingly subjected himself to sin’s punishment on behalf of sinners, the criminals so to



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speak. “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5:21).” Likewise, Martin Luther also affirms, “For we are sinners and thieves, and therefore we are worthy of death and eternal damnation. But Christ took all our sins upon himself, and for them he died on the cross (Luther’s Works 26: Galatians 3:13).”

Suffering bears hope. Jesus did not suffer aimlessly. Amid all the horror, he clearly anticipated the joy ahead. The Hebrew writer urges us, “Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb 12:1b-2).” The church is called into God’s mission of sharing the good news of hope amid suffering. Like Jesus, a suffering church offers hope by anticipating transformation: from sin to righteousness, injustice to justice, cruelty to kindness, hatred to love, animosity to fellowship, discord to harmony, and from violence to stability and peace.

If the church hides away from suffering, then it has lost its identity. The suffering, the death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is a reminder that the church must not submit to evil powers but rather resist them with utmost capability. Christ’s self-giving calls the church to avoid turning inward and instead sacrifice itself for the good of others. Indeed, the church lives not for itself, but for the world. It is not an end, but rather the means to the end.

Therefore, as we pray for the Kingdom of God to come, let us also be mindful of the pains associated with this prayer. Fallen into the hands of his adversaries, Jesus was silently led to Golgotha, knowing that he would be crucified and die, just like Isaiah prophesied. “He 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 did not open his mouth (Is 53:7).” Yet, his silence and submission were neither passive nor inactive. Instead, he faced evil, fought it, and victoriously defeated it. Nonviolent, he crashed the powers that subjected humanity to the darkness that had blinded their hearts and led them astray from God. Indeed, the multitude came before him to be delivered and freed from the bondage of sin. But above all, he also foresaw the victorious resurrection.

Like all human beings, Christians are prone to suffering. We share in the brokenness and suffering of our world. Just like the adversaries of Jesus corrupted and changed the wine into bitterness, so does the brokenness of humanity keep corrupting the good gifts of God, denying many the right to enjoy the pleasant taste. But since Christ has won all the victory for us, let us face the challenges that come in hope and prayers. Let us put our hope in him. As Christians, we have a calling to live for others as well. As the people called to be witnesses of God’s will, let us follow the example of our Lord and refuse to drink the corrupt wine, but instead put every effort to transform it back to its natural taste.

Sick in bed, the healer is at our bedside; imprisoned, we rejoice in the hope of being set free; discriminated, we anticipate deliverance; and even on our deathbed, we rejoice in the promise of resurrection.

Glory be to Christ our Lord! Amen.

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