

Good Friday (evening) • March 30, 2018

St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA

Rev. Braun Campbell

Isaiah 52:13–53:12; John 19:17-30

“Return from Exile – Sin-Bearer to Sin-Bearer: The Day of Atonement to the Atonement”ⁱ

Did you know where we were going?

Our Lenten journey started back on Ash Wednesday. We’ve moved from sackcloth and ashes and have come to the foot of the cross. It’s Good Friday. If you’re hearing these words, chances are you knew this day was coming. You’ve seen the cross, hanging front and center – not just in the time of Lent, but year-round – our journey taking us here to this point in history. Today we remember Jesus’ suffering and death. On this most solemn day of the church year, where is our joy? Where is our hope? Where is our solace? Why should this day each year be called “good?”

Let’s look back to the Old Testament. After God rescued His people from their captivity in Egypt, He stayed with them throughout their generation in the wilderness. He dwelled with them, giving Moses the instructions for building the tabernacle where He would be truly present with His people. There was a problem there, though: how could unholy people hope to be in the presence of the Holy One? They couldn’t. Something had to be done about their sin if they hoped to dwell with God without fear.

The Lord established the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). One day each year, the high priest was to go into the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle, taking the blood of a goat he sacrificed as a sin offering on behalf of the people, sprinkling the blood on the mercy seat and the ground before it. The blood of the sacrifice atoned for their sin. Cleansed of their sin, the people could dwell with God. But another goat also played an important role on the Day of Atonement.

One goat was sacrificed, with its blood poured out in the Most Holy Place. The other was the sin-bearer. You might know it by its other name: the scapegoat. God instructed Moses to have the high priest place both his hands on the head of this goat, confessing all the sins of the people of Israel and putting them on to the goat. This second, live goat would then be lead out to carry the sins of the people away into the wilderness.

Two goats were given for the people: one as a sacrifice whose blood would cleanse them from sin; the other, to bear their sin back to Azazel, to the devil, to hell. Listen to God’s word through the prophet Isaiah this Good Friday and hear this good news: Jesus Christ is both the Sacrifice and the Sin-bearer. The Servant is the Sacrifice. “*But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.*” “[S]o shall he sprinkle many nations.” (Isaiah 53:5; 52:15a) The Servant is the Sin-bearer. “*Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.*” (53:4a) Jesus, the sinless Son of God, took up all our sin, taking our place in his baptism as the sin-bearer, going out to battle with Satan in the wilderness. He carried the sins of every human being to the cross, to take them away from us forever. On this Good Friday, look to the cross and see him high and lifted up for us.

Look to the cross and see your sin. Christ carried it all to Mount Calvary, outside the walls of the city, taking it away once and for all. Jesus hung there on the cross, stripped naked, even as your secret shame is laid bare in God’s sight. Look to the cross and see everything that you have ever said, thought, and done that would alienate you from God and from your fellow human beings. Your sin and my sin, carried by the Sin-bearer.

Look to the cross and see the sacrifice made for you. Jesus is the sin offering, the goat who was stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted, whose blood was shed for you to make you clean. Look to the cross and see the forgiveness of your sins.

Our journey through Lent has brought us to Jesus. We knew we were going to the only place we could go, to the only One who could return us from exile. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Day of Atonement: he is *the* atonement, the two goats of Yom Kippur giving way to the one Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus atones for us.

“It is finished!” When Jesus died, the earth shook, and the curtain of the temple that separated the people from the Most Holy Place was torn from top to bottom. The great High Priest has gone to the mercy seat of God – not with the blood of a goat, but his own – and made atonement. Jesus has paid the price; God’s people can now dwell with Him without fear. It is finished. That makes this a good day, indeed.

Amen.

ⁱ Taken from the “Return from Exile” series by Rev. Jeffrey Pulse