

I.N.I.

Good Friday
March 30, 2018
Matthew 27:62-66

In Christ Jesus, Who has fulfilled all of His promises to us, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

This year we've spent our Lenten Sundays meditating on the ironies of Jesus' passion. Again and again, we've seen people say surprising things. We've encountered the unexpected and even the absurd. Tonight we have one more irony to consider: the words of Jesus' enemies once He was in the grave. Jesus' death didn't happen exactly the way they had wanted it to. They ended up killing Him at the least opportune moment, when they felt it was the worst time, during the Passover festival when Jerusalem was full of Jewish visitors. But they got the job done. Jesus was dead and in the tomb. They could breathe a sigh of relief and go on with their lives. However, one nagging doubt still remained:

HE SAID, "I WILL RISE AGAIN."

One of the great ironies of Jesus' passion is how often His enemies said things that were true. That is the case once again. Matthew tells us that it was the next day, the one after preparation day. That means it was the Sabbath. Now, for the Jews, the day starts when the sun goes down around 6 p.m. So it may be Friday evening after sundown or it's possible that the chief priests and Pharisees came to Pilate early Saturday morning. Whenever it was that they came, they were certain that Jesus was still in the grave. So they came and told Pilate something the governor probably didn't know:

HE SAID, "I WILL RISE AGAIN."

I. THAT WOULD BE A HORROR FOR JESUS' ENEMIES!

They were so afraid of that promise Jesus made that they risked their celebration of one of the most important Sabbaths of the year—the one during the weeklong Festival of Unleavened Bread. Remember back to their first meeting with Pontius Pilate early Friday morning, they had insisted that Pilate come out of his residence to talk to them outside, because they didn't want to be made unclean for the Passover meal. Now they gathered together and risked that uncleanness, because they had to put this doubt and fear to rest.

What did they say to Pilate? , **"SIR, WE REMEMBER, WHILE HE WAS STILL ALIVE, HOW THAT DECEIVER SAID, 'AFTER THREE DAYS I WILL RISE.'** Of course, they were totally right. Jesus had said this. And here is real irony. Jesus had at least three times clearly prophesied to His disciples that He would be killed and rise again the third day but they did not understand it. Only twice did Jesus in a concealed or hidden way allude to His resurrection to the chief priests and elders by stating **"DESTROY THIS TEMPLE, AND IN THREE DAYS I WILL RAISE IT UP"** and again when He said **"AN EVIL AND ADULTEROUS GENERATION SEEKS AFTER A SIGN, AND NO SIGN WILL BE GIVEN TO IT EXCEPT THE SIGN OF THE PROPHET JONAH. FOR AS JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE**

GREAT FISH, SO WILL THE SON OF MAN BE THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE HEART OF THE EARTH." Amazingly the unbelieving chief priests understood Jesus' cryptic message, while the believers did not understand His clear words. Unfortunately though, they did not believe it.

They called Jesus "that deceiver"---literally "that no good, despicable, deceiver." But even though they didn't believe it, this prophecy terrified them. What if it was true? They understood that if Jesus really rose, then everything that He had ever said about Himself would have to be true. That would be a horror for them, because that would mean that they had been wrong for the past three years--in fact, wrong for all their lives. They didn't want to believe that possibility existed, even though they had heard about Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead and possibly heard of the other incidents of His resurrection miracles. Their consciences were terrified. Did they really believe that Jesus' disciples, who had all fled in the Garden and only was at the foot of the cross, would do what they said to Pilate, "come during the middle of the night, steal His body, and then tell the world that Jesus had risen"? How unlikely and absurd would that be?

So they went to Pilate and explained their concerns, and Pilate gave them a salty answer. **"YOU HAVE A GUARD; GO YOUR WAY, MAKE IT AS SECURE AS YOU KNOW HOW."** After all the grief they had given him on Friday, Pilate could care less about their concerns and fears. "That's your problem! Go take care of it"

So they took some Roman soldiers and secured the tomb. These guards stood watch throughout the day and night. They even put a wax seal on the stone to show that it had not been moved. The chief priests thought they had covered all their bases. When three days were done, they would be able to show everyone that the tomb was still sealed and Jesus had not risen from the dead. Finally, this whole matter about Jesus would go away.

They exerted all this effort just to keep Jesus' words from becoming reality. The terror those words inspired in their hearts should have told them that they were indeed true. I think they knew all along that Jesus was going to rise, but their hearts were so hardened with sin and unbelief that they had no choice but to try and stop it. When the Roman soldiers told them what had happened on Sunday morning, they couldn't deny reality. So they bribed those soldiers to tell everyone that they had fallen asleep and to tell the story that they had already laid before Pilate, that the disciples came and stole His body during the night. That's how hardened their hearts were. It shows that deep inside, they really feared more than just the people being deceived and led astray. They feared that they were wrong. They feared that Jesus was right. They feared that because they had no faith. Jesus being right meant they would go to hell. So they went to all this trouble to keep Jesus' words from becoming reality. What a sad irony!

They couldn't keep Jesus from rising--no matter how many soldiers stood guard outside the tomb and no matter how thick the wax was. Even if they had had an entire army trying to hold the rock down--when that angel came down early Sunday morning, he

was going to open the tomb and show the world that Jesus was already gone. He had already risen! It was never God's plan to have the disciples steal the body. Jesus had told them God's plan.

HE SAID, "I WILL RISE AGAIN."

II. THAT WAS THE POINT OF ALL JESUS SUFFERED.

Don't you have to wonder about the disciples? As we said, at least three times Jesus told the disciples that He was going to be arrested, convicted and executed. Then He told them that on the third day He would rise from the dead. The irony is that they never figured out what He meant. It just didn't make sense for Him, their Lord, to plan to die. What kind of king would that be? What kind of conqueror dies? So Jesus' enemies took Him at His word and trembled with fear, but Jesus' friends didn't understand and they wallowed in misery and despair.

So all this effort to guard and seal the tomb was wasted. The disciples had no intention of stealing Jesus' body. They didn't even understand until after Jesus rose that that's what He always meant to do. And they were too stunned, shattered and scared to think about plotting a deception. They loved Jesus. Now He was dead. That's all they were thinking about.

Yet there was a reason God allowed all this effort to take place. God used the fear and the unbelief of the Jewish leaders for His own purposes. Jesus always planned to die. That's why He kept telling people what was going to happen. He didn't lose when He died. While it was a tragedy of inhumane injustice, at the same time, it was a victory according to God's will. It was God's love put into practice, because Jesus suffered everything that happened to Him on Good Friday **For Us!** The cross He hung on is our cross. Each of us deserves to hang there. When His Father abandoned Him, He was inflicting on Jesus what we deserved. He made His Son suffer hell and damnation there on the cross. When Jesus died, it was our death He died. He was buried in our tomb.

All that is what sin has done to us. If you're ever tempted to think that your sins really aren't a big deal because there are so many worse people out there, stop and look at the cross. This is how seriously God takes our sin. The choir will be singing these meaningful words in a few minutes: ***"Ye who think of sin but lightly nor suppose the evil great Here may view its nature rightly, Here its guilt may estimate. Mark the Sacrifice appointed, See who bears the awful load; 'Tis the WORD, the LORD'S ANNOINTED, Son of Man and Son of God.***

When God looks into our hearts, what does He see? He sees sinful thoughts, desires, and feelings. And God condemns us for that. Of course, where there are sinful thoughts and feelings, there are always sinful words and actions. Each of us is guilty. We might not always like hearing that, but especially on Good Friday, it's undeniable! On Good Friday, we see Jesus doing what every sinner has to do: He died. The reason we die is because we are guilty of sin.

However, Jesus died in our place. He was buried as we will have to be. Yet that wasn't the end. If the story ended with the guards watching and the seal, then, there would be no reason for us to ever gather here. This day would not be called "Good

Friday" but the worst Friday ever. Jesus had a further purpose. He came to rise. And the watch and seal are actually steps toward that resurrection. They prove that no one stole the body! Jesus stayed there in the grave until early Sunday morning and then He rose.

Because He rose, we know that all the suffering, the death, and all the hell Jesus experienced on Good Friday were enough. Jesus said, "**IT IS FINISHED!**" He paid for our sins, and we are forgiven. Jesus' resurrection is like a receipt that proves that He paid all that we owe. Now we are free and clear of all of our debt. Because Jesus rose, He promises us that someday we will rise. These bodies will only fall into the grave if we die before He comes back. But even if we do, He will raise these bodies when He returns, and we will live with Him in joy forever. Then there will be no sin and death ever again.

That was Jesus' plan from before He was born. It was God the Father's plan before He created the world. But when His lifeless body was laid in the tomb and it was sealed, those who loved Him couldn't see God's plan. All they knew was that their Lord was dead. All they experienced was darkness. We can understand their sorrow, but on Easter Sunday, the darkness ended. God brought them out of the darkness of sin and into the light of life. That is what Good Friday is all about. Jesus leads us out of the darkness. That was what He always planned to do.

He died. But now He lives! Because He lives, we too will live!

Amen.