

*Sermon for Good Friday [Purim], 25.iii.2005
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Brogue, Pennsylvania
The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ According to Saint John 18:1-19:42
7:30 p.m., Passion Liturgy with Veneration of the Holy Cross*

J. J. !

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was and
Who is to come. ✠ Amen.

*"There they crucified Him, and with Him two
others, one on either side, with Jesus between them."*

-- John 19:18

The nails the Roman execution detail would have used on Jesus and the other condemned men would have looked and felt something like this replica Roman crucifixion nail Linda Fritz has provided us for our reflection and worship today. The small nails you each picked up in the back of the church look similar to this, only much smaller. But, as you come forward to venerate the Holy Cross later in this service and as you place your nail in the basket with this nail, take time to pick it up, to feel its weight, to regard its contour and to think of the purpose for which it was very

specifically designed. It is no normal nail. It is designed and intended neither for wood nor for stone or masonry but for human flesh and bone, to cause pain and ghastly suffering and to put a stop to either the crime or the thought of anyone who might defy either society or the might and power of Rome.

Today we remember the attempt of a world power to put a stop to Jesus of Nazareth and to what He preached and lived and brought into this world – the Kingdom of God, the rule of God’s love and mercy in this world, a rule and a kingdom in stark contrast and opposition to the Roman idea of justice and peace based on slavery and domination. One this same day, coinciding with Good Friday this year, the Jewish people celebrate *Purim* the festival commemorating Queen Esther’s rescue of God’s people from the Persian plot to kill all the Jews. The intrigue of those powerful men of a

powerful state was thwarted, just as Rome would not succeed in silencing the Rabbi from Nazareth.

That, of course, is not all we commemorate on this Friday. We are called to remember also, and most particularly, our own unsuccessful attempts to silence the Gospel and to impede the Kingdom of God which, Luther reminds us in the Catechism, *is coming*, either with us or without us. For it was our blood—both Jew and Gentile—and our kind—sinners, the creatures who form the crowning glory of God's creation, living in open rebellion against the Crown and Majesty that created us—it is *we* who nailed Him there, is it not?

We do it all the time. We *nail down* both building materials and problems when we think we have solved those problems once and for all. We think we have someone '*pegged*' when we have defined that person's character and

identity within a mental box from which we will not let them escape. He or she *just is* thus and so, we think, and sometimes say. This individual snobbery can also easily be extended to a whole group, as small as a family unit or as large as a nationality or race.

We say that we '*nail*' others catch someone red-handed in some offense, or when we defeat our enemy with fists or words or some strategy we are sure will put our adversary right where we want him or her. Patience and mercy and forgiveness goes out the window, *once and for all*, never mind how much *we* sinners need all the patience, mercy and forgiveness in the world, never mind how *God* wills to rule this world in just that way.

On that first Good Friday, it seemed as if that was exactly what we had done. And, it seemed as if we were going to get away with it, to have our way with impunity. It

seemed for one day, and then for two, as if we had quite successfully put God and His persistent love in its place, On a shameful cross and in a borrowed tomb where we would no longer be troubled by it. It seemed as if we had indeed *nailed* Him and nailed Him *good*, for one day, and then for two. We did not, after all, *want* to be forgiven, and to have to live that forgiveness by *forgiving* others instead of *nailing* them, the *enemy* who had wronged us, the *enemy* whom we wanted so much to *nail*.

The shame of Good Friday is that Almighty God lets us have our way, and that this is what it looks like when we have that way of ours: The *innocent*, not the guilty, is nailed to death. God respects our *personhood*, our will, as He has from the beginning in creating us, even to letting the father and mother of all the living fall into disobedience, even to letting Cain kill Abel, even to letting us do whatever our

sinful hearts devise. God lets us have our way in history and in life, but not forever, not so that all love and all mercy vanish from the earth. The Father of the Son *we* nail to the cross lets us have our will for one day and for two . . . but not for three.

✠ Amen.

Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sin by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, both now and forever. ✠ Amen.

S. D. G. !