

Sermon for the Second Sunday in Lent, 12.iii.2006, 10:00 a.m.
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Bogue, Pennsylvania
Holy Eucharist, LBW Setting 2
Genesis 17:1-7,15-16; Psalm 22:22-30; Romans 4:13-25; Mark 8:31-38

J. J.!

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

*“He began to teach them that the Son of Man
must undergo great suffering, and be rejected
by the chief priests, the scribes and be killed,
and after three days rise again.”*

– Mark 8:31

What words those are! We do not have to imagine the Disciples’ reaction to Jesus’ message of the Cross, to His preaching of His own death. Peter speaks the mind of the whole group, and, if we think about it, I think He speaks our mind as well. Neither Peter nor the others had learned any of those formulas, those ‘theories of the Atonement’ as they are called in theology, those ways of trying to make the Cross make sense to us because it is part of *God’s* plan, not ours. Peter knew no such explanations. He only knew that he loved the Rabbi from Nazareth, Who had

become the Big Fisherman's dearest friend. And Peter knew exactly where this talk about being rejected and being killed was leading, *and it was not leading to any rising from the dead on the third or any other day.* His friend was talking crazy talk, and Peter was determined to stop Him, but without success. When the Disciples can no longer hear about the death of their Master for the sake of the Kingdom, Jesus turns to the crowds, to *anyone* who will listen, listen to the *good* though tragic news that God Himself, the Son of Man, loves us *that* much, to die, to die in our place, taking on Himself the penalty for *our* sin.

The Cross is *good* news. It is not *happy* news. It is not pleasant or perhaps even very interesting news. It is not *reassuring* news that the bad people, the enemies of God will not win, because they do. For almost three whole days, they win. It is not *encouraging* news to hear that Jesus must go that way, and even less encouraging to hear that *we* are called to take up our own individualized version of the Cross, headed in the same

general direction as He, to our death, to a death we are expected to accept freely. It is *bitter* news to hear ourselves called ‘Satan’—the Tempter we met in last Sunday’s Gospel—when we try to save Him, to save ourselves. It is bitter news, it is *hard* news to hear, news filled with pathos, news about the broken heart of God the Father, but the Cross is still *good* news for us—
Gospel.

The Cross and the Crucified is hidden in that promise God first made to Abram and Sarai, changing their names to ‘Abraham’ and ‘Sarah,’ drawing a red line across the page of human history, signaling a turning point. The promise, as we hear in today’s First Reading, is the promise of descendants, the promise of flourishing life, of a new history in which God will participate personally, not simply observing as Judge. Abraham and Sarah glimpse with horror on what seems to be the end, the revocation of the promise as Abraham is commanded to offer up

his only son, the child of God's own promise, but Isaac is rescued by the Living God and His Angel. The sacrifice is postponed until another time, a time at the center of history. Sarah's near grief is transferred centuries later to Mary's real sorrow as she stands beneath the wooden crossbars of *her* Son's offering up, suspended on wood collected not by kinsmen or family servants but by strangers, foreigners in the land of God's promise to Abraham. And it will be God's own fatherly love that is put to the test for our sake, for the sake of a new and final turning point in history. Now the inheritance of God's blessing will not depend solely on those who heard the old family story of Abraham and Sarah. The new inheritance of the New Testament of God will now and ever after depend of faith, faith that Jesus did what He prophesied, that He *did* enter into mortal conflict with the powers of Temple and Empire, faith that He did *not* allow Himself to be turned away from the way of the Cross by those friends, like Peter, who loved Him, faith that, in the face

of massive suffering, in the face of real death and the real human dread of death, He *did* lay His life down willingly *for me*. That is hard news to hear.

That news is *good*, the Cross is *Gospel*, regardless of whether we hear it in time to change our choices in life, and thus to lead life more gracefully, more peacefully, more joyfully, though many do hear it in time to do just that. The news of the Cross is also the Gospel of my salvation even if I have made a complete mess of my life and that of others, even if I may *never in this lifetime* get back the good things and the good people with which and with whom I had been blessed, even if I may never be able to take back the evil word I have spoken, even though I may never have back the opportunity I squandered to do good. The Cross is *good news* for us because the sacrifice is God's, at just the right time and with enough love to cover the sins of the whole world, the sins of a whole lifetime, and *that* news, my friends, is as good as it gets. ✠ Amen.



Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins 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. ✠ Amen.

