

Prayer of Supplication

Almighty God, your Son Jesus Christ was lifted high upon the cross so he might draw the whole world to himself. Grant that we, who glory in his death for our salvation, may also glory in his call to take up our cross and follow him; through Jesus Christ our lord. **Amen.**

Message: Lamb of God

It’s dark outside this evening. It’s appropriate for us to gather at this time for a service of Tenebrae, a service of darkness, when we remember Jesus’ death on a cross. But there’s a big difference: the darkness we are experiencing is natural. The sun has set and the stars and moon are out. The darkness that covered the land of Israel on the Friday afternoon when Jesus was crucified was different.

Supernatural darkness covered the whole land. Jesus was crucified at mid-day and died in the middle of the afternoon, so the sun was out – yet it could not be seen. Passover is always held during a time of the new moon – there is no way it could have been an eclipse. The darkness represented all the forces of evil and the darkness of our sins as they gathered at one moment. I believe it would be truly frightening to experience, regardless of our modern scientific knowledge and sophistication. That’s because the darkness was palpable and true evil was present.

If we had been there, we would have wondered, “What’s up?” What happened that afternoon was foretold. It fulfilled God’s Law. Jewish law called for the sacrifice of a male lamb, unblemished and without defect, to atone for sins. The high priest made that sacrifice once a year on the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, when sacrifices were made for sins of the people. Jesus is our High Priest. Jesus himself is the Lamb of God, sinless, innocent and perfect. Jesus is the one sacrifice - one final sacrifice, for your sins, my sins and the sins of all people for all time. What’s amazing is this: Jesus willingly sacrificed himself for us! Jesus came down from heaven and was born as a human to save us. Jesus’ birth, life and death is a divine gift of abundant grace so universal, enormous and intense mere words cannot express it.

The crushing weight of our sins fell upon Jesus. Physically, it was present in the darkness that covered the land. Spiritually, it filled Jesus’ spirit, making him who had no sin into the very vessel of sin, filled with our sins. Is it surprising he cried out to God the Father in agony during his last few moments on the cross,

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34).

This is a great mystery. Jesus is the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity. Jesus is of the same substance, being and character of God. Jesus is inseparable from God for all of eternity. And yet God the Father rejected God the Son on our behalf so we might be saved. How could that which cannot be separated be separated? God rejected Jesus, God’s only Son, sacrificing the Lamb of God so we might be given the gift of salvation. Because of Jesus’ death on the cross, God understands our suffering and the sinful temptations we face.

Paul spoke of our temptation to sin and the meaning of the cross in Romans 6:3-4, *“How can we who died to sin go on living in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?”* We are called to share Jesus’ passion: rebirth as a new creation, death of our sins, even death of our body and burial. This is hard to understand, but it’s important for us to wrestle with in order to have eternal life.

You see, **Jesus’ message to all people has always remained the same,** *“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it”* (Mark 8:34-35).

Tonight, the cross is before us with all of it’s darkness, suffering and death on display. Let us somberly embrace it out of love for our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.