



THE FAITH WE SHARE

A STUDY OF THE APOSTLES' CREED

Week Four: "He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to hell."

Isaiah 53, Romans 5: 6-8

Opening Question: How would you describe power? Who are some of the most powerful people in our culture and world today? What characteristics does a powerful person have?

CONTEXT

A quick look back: Look at the Creed together. Why does it matter that every section begins with the words "I believe"? How did we see the Trinity in action in the birth story of Christ? How does the incarnation of Christ allow us to understand God's fulfilled promise to be "God with us"?

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.

**He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to hell.**

The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended to heaven

and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen

Today's Passage: Today we come to a central event in the biblical story- the crucifixion and death of Jesus. The necessity for Jesus' death can only be understood in the context of the bigger story of Scripture. In the Old Testament, God gave his people Israel a system of sacrifices where animals were offered to show that sin is serious and brings death. These sacrifices acted as substitutes- an innocent animal died in place of the person who sinned to help the people understand their need for forgiveness. The problem was that these sacrifices had to be repeated again and again and again. Forgiveness was never complete. That is, not until God himself became the perfect sacrificial Lamb in the person of Jesus. Today we will use Isaiah 53 and Romans 5 to help us enter this story of costly love and lavish grace. Isaiah was written LONG before the life and death of Jesus, but the inspired words of the prophetic author describe with beauty and clarity both the historical and theological realities of Christ's death. Romans, written AFTER the events of Christ's life, death, and resurrection, helps us to understand that the frame of this story has always been- and will always be- God's powerful and never-ending love.

CONTENT

Read Isaiah 53 and Romans 5: 6-8 out loud and then pick ONE of the following ways (Option A, B, or C) to help your group engage with these passages.

Option A. Notice/Wonder: Ask everyone to read the passage again quietly on their own. As they read, ask them to make a list like the one below. Remember that what people notice or wonder can just be small, simple things.

What do I NOTICE about this text? What do I WONDER about?

Once everyone has had the chance to make their list, come together as a group to share and discuss your observations, writing them in a place where everyone can see the list as it develops.

Option B. Creative Engagement: Give everyone paper and drawing supplies. Have everyone read the passage again on their own, then invite them to spend some time illustrating the passage (or a part of the passage) in whatever way they want- concrete, abstract, colors, images, lists, words. When everyone has completed their art, come together to share and discuss what you drew and why.

Option C. Guided Bible Study Questions:

1. Vs 3 describes Jesus as “a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering.” This indicates that Jesus’ sorrow and suffering were not just limited to his death but were part of his whole life. From what you know of Jesus, in what other ways did he experience sorrow and suffering even before his death?
2. This passage has many ways to describe the intensity and enormity of what Jesus endured in his death. Are there any descriptors that stand out to you? Why?
3. We can sometimes imagine Jesus’ death as something that happened to him. How does vs 4a and the second half of vs 12 challenge this idea? How is Jesus involved in what is happening?
4. Vs 5 tells us what we receive from Jesus’ sacrifice and suffering. What is ours because of what Jesus did?
5. The Isaiah passage uses sheep imagery to describe and contrast. How do we act and live like sheep (vs 6)? How does Jesus live and act like a sheep (vs 7)?
6. In Romans 5: 8 we learn what is at the heart of this sacrifice. What does Christ’s suffering and death demonstrate to us?

APPLICATION

How does all of this connect to our lives? Here are some questions to help guide your discussion. Choose one or several.

- Power in our world is often gained by being louder. Stronger. Proving oneself “right”. Gathering followers through charisma or charm or force. But the story told here gives us a totally different picture of power. Remember that the Creed last week taught us that Jesus is LORD. Talk about what power looks like, acts like in the person of Jesus in this passage. What does this teach us about our own power as people made in the image of Christ?
- Romans 8 says clearly that when we least deserved it, God poured out His love for us in the person of Jesus. Have you ever had someone love you in a beautiful or important way at a time in your life where you felt particularly hard to love? Share with the group.
- The Creed only names two specific people outside the persons of the Trinity- Mary and Pontius Pilate. Pilate is the Roman governor who ultimately sentences Jesus to death, though the gospels depict him as trying to convince the Jewish people not to kill Jesus. Why do you think Pilate- of all people- is included in the Creed?
- Isaiah tells us that Jesus is well acquainted with sorrow and suffering. That he takes up our pain and carries our grief in his arms. The Creed tells us that Jesus descended to hell, witnessing and experiencing the totality of all that is wrong and twisted and evil in the world. Is there an ache or grief or area of suffering in your life or in this world that you need to picture being carried in Jesus’ arms? Share with each other if comfortable.

PRAYER

Close your time together in prayer using one of the ideas below

- Use words/images/themes from the passage to guide your prayer.
- Raise up your “wonderings” from the notice/wonder section to God in prayer
- Take prayer requests and pray over each other as a group or in small groups
- Use this prayer excerpt by Kate Bowler, taken from her Good Friday prayer, **“for Good Friday,”** in *The Lives We Actually Have*:

God have mercy. Christ have mercy. Spirit have mercy. The thick of dusk has fallen and betrayal seems the order of the day.

The night when Love itself was handed over to brutal ignorance and cunning that loved deceit.

Oh God, you chose to feel what we feel- to be spit on, ridiculed, tortured, and to die all alone.

In your outstretched arms on the cross, are you gathering to yourself every hideous thing, every failure, every travesty, and wrong?

Blessed are we who say: Yes! Take this pain. Turn things right side up again.

I can see, only now, that you will follow me to the end and beyond. The day love died, something new was born, and may we be a people open to the grief, the loss, and then, yes, the rising of the Son. Amen.