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Sermon

February 28th. Lent 2

To Jesus Christ who, being found in appearance as a man, humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross, to Him be eternal glory. Amen. Our sermon text this morning is taken from Hebrews, chapter 2, starting at verse 10.

Certainly it was fitting for God (the one for whom and through whom everything exists), in leading many sons to glory, to bring the author of their salvation to his goal through sufferings. 11 For he who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified all have one Father. For that reason, he is not ashamed to call them brothers. 12 He says: I will declare your name to my brothers. Within the congregation I will sing your praise. 13 And again: I will trust in him. And again: Here I am and the children God has given me. 14 Therefore, since the children share flesh and blood, he also shared the same flesh and blood, so that through death he could destroy the one who had the power of death (that is, the Devil) 15 and free those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death

This is the Word of The LORD!!! The congregation may be seated...

Mercy, Grace, and peace are yours through your God and Father, and through His Son, Jesus Christ, true God and Man, dear fellow Sons and Daughters of the King...

Well, we've made it. Today is the last day in the month of February. Even though this month is the shortest in our calendar, it often seems like the longest. February is often the time when everyone is just ready to get to spring as soon as possible.

March, on the other hand, is a month of transition and hope. They say that March "comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb". That is to say, there still may be a touch of winter nastiness coming into this month, but by the time it's over, things will be looking up.

What does March mean to you? For me, it means one thing. College basketball. It is the time for the phenomenon known as "March Madness". It is a time for Cinderella stories, upsets and busted brackets, and cutting down the nets. Anything can happen in a given 40 minutes on the hardwood. It is the season of win or go home. Survive and advance. What does it take to make it through the madness into championship glory? Well, it takes hard work, God-given talent, strong leadership, and honestly catching a break or two.

What is the biggest upset of all time? In 2018 the number one seeded Virginia Cavaliers played and lost to the #16 seeded University of Maryland, Baltimore

County Terriers. In the entire history of the tournament, a #1 seed had never lost to a 16 up until that point. After suffering this tremendous upset, Virginia would go on the next year to win it all.

But that is not the greatest upset ever. That came on the hardwood of the cross. When Jesus went up against death on the cross and overcame it, that was the all-time undefeated going down. Death, that juggernaut, was upset by the author of salvation Jesus Christ. How did He pull this off? Well, it took a lifetime of hard work, constantly following the law. It also took talent, it took Him being the Son of God. It also took the leadership of His Father putting this plan in motion since the foundation of the world. And it took Jesus not catching a break, it took Him suffering and shedding His holy blood. It took His death to defeat the undefeated force of death. Through His death, we have been set free from the fear of death forever! And so, we pray, OH LORD, SANCTIFY US BY YOUR TRUTH, YOUR WORD IS TRUTH. AMEN...

"What is your current pain level?" Have you ever been asked this question? If you have, there is a good chance you were in the hospital when you were asked it. It can be hard to fully express the amount of pain

we feel from one moment to the next. For medical professionals, it is important to determine how much pain their patient is suffering. They need to be able to understand it so that they can ease it. So, they have this chart of different smiley/frowny faces that you can look at to determine what pain level you are at. The 0 level is a face that is smiling and is described as “no pain”. Somewhere around the 4-6 mark the face is no longer smiling and beginning to frown. The 10 level has a face that is full-on frowning and crying. That level is described as “unimaginable and unspeakable”.

When it came to the Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world, suffering would surely be a part of that. **Certainly it was fitting for God (the one for whom and through whom everything exists), in leading many sons to glory, to bring the author of their salvation to his goal through sufferings.**

The term, “The author of salvation” is an interesting Greek word. It is a word that combines two other greek words. The first word means, “beginning, first thing, or foundation” and it is combined with the verb that means “to lead” as on a journey. It is only used 4 times in the New Testament. Our translation renders it here, “author”, but other translations go with terms like, “captain, founder, and pioneer”. In other non-biblical ancient Greek writings, it is a word used for a founder of a city, the founding father of a tribe or clan, and the commander of an army who led his men from in front in order to blaze the way for them into battle.

I like considering all of these concepts when understanding fully what Jesus means to us. He is the founding father (along with the rest of the trinity) of our faith. He is the first pioneer of Christianity and He is our chief. He blazed the trail that we walk to heaven. He founded the faith that we hold to. He’s the author, the one who wrote out the picture of salvation for us mortal men. But He was also a mortal man. Men suffer. Jesus suffered too.

One movie line that always sticks in my head is taken from the movie, *Princess Bride*. The dread pirate Roberts is talking to the princess about how he remembered her long-lost love. He says that her love Wesly, who he secretly is, was a coward. She

responds with, “You mock my pain!” to which he retorts, “Life IS pain highness. Anyone who tells you otherwise is selling something.”

That’s a pretty bleak outlook on life, but it is rather true isn’t it? Life is pain. It is painful. Of course, there are other things in addition to it, but pain often highlights life at times. We are born through in pain, we enter this world screaming and crying. We live and learn that we suffer pain physically and emotionally. We get older and pain becomes chronic. Sometimes it seems like certain people may have higher thresholds for it, but we all suffer, we go through pain to one degree or another.

Jesus would be no exception to that rule. In fact, He is the one who would have to suffer the most! The theology of the cross is bloody. It is downright nasty. Lent is the season where we focus on Christ’s sufferings. We see visual depictions of His passion and we think, “Man, that looks painful.” and it does. There He was, whipped and beaten, a crown of thrones pounded into His head, nails driven through His hands and feet, bleeding and crucified on the cross. The pain is evident.

But that was just the tip of the iceberg when it came to the extent of Jesus’ sufferings. The physical pain from the crucifixion is a 0 in comparison to the other pain He was going through. He didn’t just suffer the pain of crucifixion on the cross. No, He suffered the pangs of hell. Talk about “unimaginable and unspeakable” pain! His Father had abandoned Him. He suffered the pangs of hell on the cross because that was what it took to bring Him to the goal He set out to accomplish. **Certainly it was fitting for God ... to bring the author of their salvation to his goal through sufferings.** Not only was that what it took, but it was also fitting! Was it fitting because He deserved it? No, it was fitting because we deserved it. He suffered because of our sins! How does Isaiah describe Jesus, the suffering servant? **Surely he was taking up our weaknesses, and he was carrying our sufferings. We thought it was because of God that he was stricken, smitten, and afflicted, 5 but it was because of our rebellion that he was pierced.**

He was crushed for the guilt our sins deserved. (Isaiah 53:4-5a EHV)

Why did He go through so much pain and agony on the cross? Well, it was so that we might be His brother. **11 For he who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified all have one Father. For that reason, he is not ashamed to call them brothers. 12 He says: I will declare your name to my brothers. Within the congregation I will sing your praise. 13 And again: I will trust in him. And again: Here I am and the children God has given me.**

Recently we had a sermon text that talked about how the brothers of Jesus did not believe in Him. On another occasion, Jesus was preaching and teaching, and He was interrupted because His mother and brothers were outside trying to get Him to come out to them. Perhaps they were a bit hesitant of the fact that He drew such a crowd. But what was Jesus' response to the family's request? **But He answered and said to the one who told Him, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" 49 And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers!" (Mat 12:48-49 NKJ)**

That fact is both humbling and gratifying at the same time. Jesus, the Holy Lamb of God, the creator of the universe, considers us to be brothers, family. We know we are not worthy of such consideration. Why would Jesus not be **ashamed to call us brothers**? We are sinners and He is holy! He should be ashamed of us. But He isn't....

Why isn't He? Because of what He does for us. It is through His own sacrifice that He is not ashamed of us. He is the great high priest. He is simultaneously sacrifice and sacrificer at the same time. What does the writer to the Hebrews mean when he says here, **For he who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified all have one Father**? He who sanctifies is Jesus. Those being sanctified are us. He makes us holy through His holy blood. That is what "sanctify" means, to make holy. Jesus makes us sinners into holy saints. He is the divine and human source of holiness. This means we are not just His brothers, it means we are His HOLY brothers. We are holy

because our brother Jesus is holy, and He laid down His life for us.

What did it take to make us His brother and therefore children of God? Well, it took sacrifice. Sacrifice means blood. His cross drips with blood. But this is not a terrifying sight. It is freedom, and it is a beauty! **14 Therefore, since the children share flesh and blood, he also shared the same flesh and blood, so that through death he could destroy the one who had the power of death (that is, the Devil) 15 and free those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death**

How are you around blood? A lot of us are squeamish around even the sight of it. We all have it inside of us, yet when we see blood it can turn our stomachs or send a wave of fear through us. I have a friend who likes to tell a story about another friend of mine, and they were classmates in grade school. There was a presentation about the danger of drugs. Somewhere during the presentation, the topic of needles came up. Mind you there were no needles present. But even the thought of a needle in the bloodstream made my friend, probably in 7th grade at the time, lose all color in his face, and ended up passing out.

We don't like to think about blood, but it is the key to our victory over death! Normally the loss of blood is one of the reasons for death. But the loss of Jesus' blood is the source of death's destruction. The fact that the cross is bloody shouldn't make us recoil, it should make us stand up in wonder!

Hebrews says here, **he also shared the same flesh and blood** On the cross, it was evident that He indeed was flesh and blood. But why? Why did Jesus have to have our flesh and blood? This is the case for several reasons. First of all, He didn't. He could have stayed in heaven and left us sitting in our doomed sins. But He loved us, so He became like us. Because your God loved you so much, He was willing to set aside His holy immortality and take on this human flesh instead.

Jesus also had to take on our flesh and blood to experience what we go through. He had to suffer as

we do. He had to feel the temptations that we face and beat them. For Him to be our great high priest, our advocate between God and Man, well He needed to be like us. To be our brother. To be able to relate with us. The book of Hebrews goes on to say, **For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. (Heb 4:15 NKJ)**

He also had to have this same flesh and blood like we do in order that He be under the same law that we are. Why didn't Jesus just zap down from heaven, go to the cross, die, and that was that? Well, then He wouldn't have lived under the same law that we do. If He wasn't born and live a life, then He wouldn't have been the perfect sacrifice. He still would have been perfect, He is God. But He wouldn't have been an eligible sacrifice in accordance with that law. As Paul writes to the Galatians: **But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. (Gal 4:4-5 ESV)**

But the most important reason Jesus had to take on our flesh and blood was so that He would be able to shed it. As our text puts it here: **he also shared the same flesh and blood, so that through death he could destroy the one who had the power of death**

Jesus is God. God is eternal and immortal. He has no beginning and no end. What is the first thing we read in the Bible? **In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1 NKJ)** In the beginning, God created. He already was. John further explains it for us: **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. (Joh 1:1-2 NKJ)** At the very beginning of everything we know, God simply WAS. The Word, that is Jesus, WAS with God. God didn't create the Word, the Word just WAS. Not only the Word WAS, but the Word WAS also with God, and the Word WAS God.

And yet, the Word who always was and who forever shall be, He died. He had to. He had to shed blood in order to pay our debt of sin. God's holy plan for the salvation of mankind features a sense of holy irony

here, doesn't it? It is through death that the one who has the power of death dies... Just let that concept sink in for a while...

What does this text identify as the enemies who die as a result of His death? **so that through death he could destroy the one who had the power of death (that is, the Devil) 15 and free those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death** The enemies on His holy hit list are death, the one who has the power of death, aka the Devil, and the fear of death. That is quite the resume. He destroys death because now there is no real threat in view of the resurrection. He defeats Satan because now his folly is fully complete. And He defeats the fear of death. That is the main obstacle to His kingdom. To those who believe in Jesus, we don't need to be afraid to die. Why? Because it is now through death that we become fully realized (as this text puts it) as **sons to glory**. It is through the death of Jesus that death, and everything and everyone associated with it dies.

I love March. It is the reflective time of Lent. It is the transition from the cold of winter into the brightness of spring. Things awaken and are revitalized.

And also, I love March because of college basketball. It is great to have a team you root for make it to the dance as they say. But even when your team doesn't make it, March Madness is about as good as it gets for a sports fan. Why? The sheer volume of the competition is amazing. It is also fun due to the range of prestige. You regularly have matchups where small schools compete with huge, blue-blooded, national basketball factories. It's also fun because of the stakes. Your whole season comes down to one game. It's win or go home time. Usually, chalk prevails. But sometimes, you get that underdog who for one game punches above their weight. There is nothing more exciting or frustrating than the upset. They call it March Madness for a reason.

The greatest upset wasn't Virginia vs. UMBC, or any other sporting match. It was Jesus upsetting death. A man died. It looked like death just rolled on. But the grave could not hold Him down. He rose triumphantly. What did this mean for us? We don't just watch from

the nosebleeds interested in the outcome. No, we had skin in the game. His flesh and blood! His death means that we no longer need to fear death, Satan, or fear the fear of death. Because our Redeemer lives, so too shall we. In our flesh, we will see God. We are His brothers and He makes us sons of glory.

Blood can be jarring. It can make us queasy. It can make us afraid. But never the blood of Jesus. It gives us the opposite reaction. It empowers us. It enables us to live and die with confidence. It doesn't matter now that the odds are stacked against us. Our victory is sure. It is completed. We get to win and go home, home to a heavenly reign. The victory that we have been made a part of is completely completed through Christ! How so? By God bringing **the author of (our) salvation to his goal through sufferings**. All praise and thanks be to Jesus Christ, that great and awesome priestly pioneer, who suffered and died so that we really never have to! AMEN!!!