

4-9-2009, Maundy Thursday B  
Chapelwood UMC, Lake Jackson

Out of the Ashes  
Comes Life  
Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19

As Jesus gathered his disciples together in the Upper Room for the Passover feast, he knew that soon his body would be broken and his blood would be shed. His life would be reduced to ashes.

But, like the Psalmist, he knew that his Father would bring something good from these ashes.

He told his disciples that his broken body and his shed blood would create a new covenant. Of course we know what that new covenant would be. God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah and told us what that new covenant would be:

But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more. Jeremiah 31:33-34

This is the covenant that God established with us by Christ's death. On the Cross, God has declared that our iniquities are forgiven, and our sins are forgotten. The barrier of the uncleanness of our guilt, which separated us from the holiness and righteousness of God, has been removed. We have been granted the right to enter into the presence of God and to know God. In the presence of God, we have seen and understood what true righteousness is. We no longer need to be taught hundreds of laws to tell what to do in hundreds of situations. The law of love has been written on our hearts. We understand the purpose of the laws. We understand what is right and good without having to be instructed.

None of that would have been possible without Christ's death. If there had been any other way, the Father would not have sent His Son to suffer and die. But there was no other way.

Christ understood that. That's why Christ was willing to endure the Cross. He certainly had no desire to suffer and die. That is made clear when he left the Upper Room to go into the Garden of Gethsemane, where he suffered such anguish thinking of what he would soon suffer, that he sweat drops of blood. Yet, he was able to be true to his resolution to go through with this by praying, "Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, no my will, but thine, be done."

In that prayer Jesus was saying that he was willing to endure the pain and suffering, because he trusted that his Father would bring something good out of it, the salvation of the world.

Sometimes good can only come from the ashes of sacrifice. There is no other way.

There was a woman who had three daughters. The oldest daughter was a brilliant student and a natural leader. The youngest daughter was beautiful and a gifted musician. The middle daughter was not outstanding in any way. As she entered her teen years, she became more and more angry and rebellious. She was certain that her mother loved her sisters more than her. One evening this girl was going out with her friends. They were the wrong kind of crowd. It was certain that they would get into some kind of mischief before the night was out.

As the girl was getting dressed, she decided to ask her mother to let her wear one of her mother's necklaces. It was a very special necklace, a family heirloom. The mother's grandmother gave it to her very near the end of her life. The mother never wore the necklace, except on the most special of occasions. She talked about how she felt her grandmother's presence when she wore it.

This was not a special occasion. The girl did not expect her mother to let her wear the necklace. Her sisters had asked to wear it on far more formal occasions, and the mother had said, no. To her great surprise the mother said yes to the girl.

She threw it over an especially grungy shirt, which was the uniform of her friends. They went out. At some point they decided it would be good fun to go to a cemetery and knock over tombstones. Someone saw them and called the police. When the police came, they ran. She escaped and made her way home. When she got home, she sneaked into the room which she shared with her older sister. She told her sister what had happened, and she was talking, suddenly she noticed the necklace was gone, lost in the scramble. She said, "I lost mother's necklace. She will really be mad when she finds out. She deserves it, the way she treats me." Her sister said, "No, she won't be angry, and she won't be surprised. When you left, I found her crying. She told me that she would never see her necklace again. When I asked her why she let you have it, she said, 'There is no other way to show her how much I love her.'"

The girl's heart was broken. She was overcome with remorse and guilt. She went to her mother and told her what happened and told her she was sorry. They just held each other and cried. They cried until all the anger and resentment the girl had built up over many years was gone.

For the rest of her life, the mother grieved for the lost necklace, but she never regretted letting her daughter have it. Out of the ashes of her grief and sacrifice came the healing of her daughter's heart. There was no other way.

The sacrifice God made for the healing of our hearts was far greater than the sacrifice that mother made. The Father sacrificed his beloved Son. The Son sacrificed his body and his blood. The Father and the Son were reduced to the ashes of grief and pain. Out of those ashes came our salvation. There was no other way.

When realize that God loves us deeply enough to be reduced to ashes, our hearts are broken, and the tears flow. And those tears heal our sinsick souls. Out of the ashes of sacrifice comes salvation and life. There is no other way.

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