

“Who Wanted Jesus to Die?”

Philippians 2:5-11

As we enter Holy Week, we ponder the question: Who wanted Jesus to die? The list is actually amazingly long, we hear about some of the primary culprits in our Gospel reading this evening/morning: Barabbas, the chief priests, the vast majority of the council of elders called the Sanhedrin, the mob gathered in Pilate’s courtyard, and even the somewhat sympathetic character of Pontius Pilate himself. They all had sinful motives, albeit different motives, for wanting Jesus to die. Satan is certainly high on the list, as is Judas Iscariot, but probably the most intriguing character with the greatest motivation was God the Father Himself. He wanted Jesus to die.

As sad and painful as it must have been, the Father’s desire for Christ to die was brought about by Adam’s sin and its tragic consequences. God’s gift of life at creation was destroyed by sin, and mankind became alienated from God. There was only one way for that tragedy to be reversed; namely, Christ was made to die as our substitute to pay for the sins of the world. Only then could life be restored. Only then could our relationship with the Father be reconciled. We talked about this at length last week, and this has been the underlying theme of our Lenten Season: It was God’s will for Jesus to die.

The depth of God the Father's love for us is seen in His willing desire to send His only-begotten Son into the depths of humility, pain, and misery for our sake. When Christ entered the world, the Lord knew full well what the plan was. He is all-knowing. He sees the future. He is not some divine cheerleader urging and hoping that good things will happen. He is in control, and even has the fore-sight to turn the evil desires of Satan and the chief priests and the Pharisees into a blessing.

The plan for salvation had been, from the time of Adam, that the Son of God would be the final, complete, fulfilling sacrifice. As we heard in Paul's letter to the Philippians, the Son of God made Himself nothing (emptied Himself of all glory and honor), made Himself a servant. He humbled Himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross. He was obedient to the will of the Father. We will hear in our readings on Good Friday, from the prophet Isaiah, that it was the Father's will to “crush Him and cause Him to suffer.”

A further question beyond who wanted Jesus to die is the question often raised regarding our Father in heaven, if God knows the future and knew from the beginning that we were going to fall into sin, why did He bother to create us? Once again, the answer comes from our understanding of the depth of God's love for us.

The same question could be posed to any parent: If you knew that your children would rebel at times, disobey you, have dirty diapers, go through the “terrible two's (and terrible three's”), worse yet – become teenagers; why did you have them? And why didn't you get rid of them at some point? Wouldn't

your life have been easier?

But you love them. And you would do anything for them. Our Father in heaven is no different. He loves you, and would do anything for you. Our Father in heaven wanted Jesus to die, so that you might live.

We have six teenagers confessing their faith and confirming the faith of their Baptism (tomorrow/later today). They are going to stand before God and His church and publicly confirm that faith, and pledge their intent to let nothing ever separate them from Christ and His Church.

They are going to make the same pledge of faith that I made and most of us made when we were their age. They are going to make the same pledge of faith that the sponsors, parents, and really the entire church made on behalf of them when they were baptized.

And after they have stated the words of the Apostle's Creed, reaffirming the faith created in them at their Baptism, I will ask them several questions.

I will ask them: "Do you intend to hear the Word of God and receive the Lord's Supper faithfully? Do you intend to live according to the Word of God, and in faith, word, and deed to remain true to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, even to death? Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?" And they will answer each of these questions: "I do, by the grace of God."

These were not questions that the people who sang praises to Jesus on Palm Sunday were prepared to answer. The people who sang:

“Hosanna to the Son of David...Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord...Hosanna in the highest,” were many of the same people who yelled: “Crucify Him!” only a few days later.

It is a wonderful day in the life of the church as we see the young baptized children of God growing to the full stature that God intended, and making the public confession that Jesus Christ is Lord. But it is also a day to be reminded of the reason why Christ had to come. The Son of God had to come and be the sacrifice for your sin. The Son of God had to be lifted up on a cross because no one but the Son of God could satisfy the demands of the Law. When you think about it, we can all add ourselves to the list of who wanted Jesus to die.

Thankfully, God loved each of you so much that He sent His Son to take your place as the one who must suffer for sin. And He has called you a child whom He loves. He has given you a place at His Table. Even more, He has reserved for all of His faithful a place in His eternal kingdom. We are not like the people on Palm Sunday who celebrated the joy of one day, but then ignored the real reason for which Christ came into that city.

He entered that city for you. He was mocked, flogged, beaten, and crucified for you. The broken body and shed blood of Christ our Lord was given and shed for you. Christ our Lord humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross. And we look to Him, bow our knee, and with our tongues confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.