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Ash Wednesday
February 17, 2010

Sermon Texts: Joel 2: 1-2, 12-17
Psalm 51: 1-17
Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-21
II Corinthians 5: 20b - 6: 10

Sermon Title: "He Died for Me"

Sermon Topic: Remembering Ash Wednesday

Sermon Purpose: To teach the meaning of Ash Wednesday and the Memory of why it's so important to our Christian lives.

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Sermon Prayer: Lord Jesus, as we ponder on your holy Passion, endow us with Your Spirit for such meditation. Grant that, in devotion and faith, we may cherish the image of your suffering, pain, and death; but also the witness of Your life, love, and victory. Amen.

What happened during the singing of the first hymn, this evening? Maybe it didn't seem as though anything happened. Oftentimes, we're not even aware of the gifts God has given us: the opportunity to be in worship with other believers, our everyday relationships, the otherwise insignificant things that happen to us every minute of the day.

The nail you received may seem "ho-hum." It may seem as though it's just another stupid nuisance that has crept into this otherwise dull day. Many times, that's exactly how we respond to the things God has provided for us. We underestimate these things because they're quite ordinary, or maybe they're not as magnificent or showy as what someone else has received.

I have no doubt that some have perceived the nail as a useless gift; like an unsharpened pencil, a blank piece of paper, or an empty soda can. Sometimes, we feel such items represent how we feel about our lives - pointless as that pencil, dull as that piece of paper, empty as that soda can, ordinary as this nail.

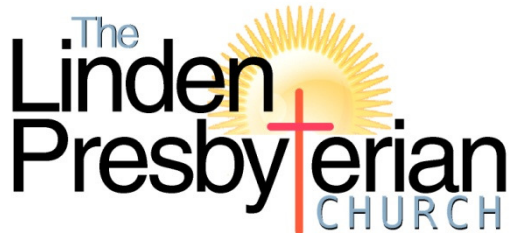
But, God has given us life, itself. And, in giving us life, He has given us all. We take so much for granted until we don't have it anymore.

Try this! Close your eyes. Hold your breath as long as possible, until you can't hold it any longer.

Now, just think what a privilege it is to draw another breath!

Imagine Jesus, hanging on the cross, laboring for His every breath, willingly enduring that pain and anguish so we might be spared the penalty of death for the sin that has found its way into our lives. Remember these words, and repeat them to yourself - once each day during Lent: "He died for me."





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"He died for me." What do these words mean to you? When you think about them, what do they bring to mind?

He died as my substitute ... in my place ... where I should have died ... the way I should have died.

He died because of me ... if it were not for my sins, His death would not have been necessary.

He died for my benefit ... to supply me with forgiveness, to nourish me with life, and to provide me with salvation.

These are just three ways of reading that simple sentence. Another way might be to think about it one word at a time:

"He" - Who? Why Him? ...

"died" - How? Where? Why?? ...

"for" - In place of? On behalf of? For the benefit of? Because of? ...

"me" - Why me? Who am I?

Some people tie a string around their finger to remind them of something. This Lenten Season, I hope the "gimmick" of a nail will serve that purpose for you - a frequent reminder to meditate daily on the crucifixion of Christ and its meaning for you, personally. Each of you received a nail, during the first hymn, this evening, to carry in your pocket or purse, for these forty days of remembering and preparing.

This is Christ's nail; representing the one that marked His hands or the one that pierced His feet: the nail that was driven in anger and in ignorance, the nail that spilled that precious blood.

This is also your nail and my nail. It reminds us of those things in our lives that have caused that crucifixion and suffering, that painful death, and apparent destruction of a godly kingdom on earth. It was a nail like this that terminated the teacher-student relationship between Jesus and His disciples, that severed the bond of earthly love and admiration between the leader and His followers: men, women, and children.

The same nail that signifies our sin and the punishment we deserve also bears witness to God's love and forgiveness in Jesus Christ! It proclaims the Good News that death isn't the end of the road, anymore; that there is a life beyond - a life filled with hope and beauty, with peace and with God's power and authority. This life was secured for us by Christ's nail.

Like a string on your finger, let your nail remind each day of the message shared with the world when a nail - similar to this one - was driven into the flesh of our Lord and Savior. Think about the suffering and the death of our Lord Jesus: the reasons for it happening, the result of that event. Think about the meaning of that suffering and death for you personally: the gift from God, and the love we receive and share, today.





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Remember these words, as you hold your nail each day: "He has forgiven me all my sins. Christ has utterly wiped out the damning evidence of broken laws and shattered commandments which has always hung over my head, and has completely annulled it by nailing it over His own thorn-crowned head on the cross. And then, having disarmed all the powers ranged against me, He exposed them - shattered, empty, and defeated - in His final glorious and triumphant act!"

Today let your nail remind you of this simple but profound four-word sentence: He died for me!

Let us pray:

Almighty God, Who gave us life and freedom and encouraged us to serve and to experience your blessings, we thank you for Jesus Christ who was sent to save us from the results of our strong-mindedness, our self-service, and our willful ignorance of your desires for us. Keep us mindful, during these next forty days, of the magnitude of the gift of life and the sacrificial gift of love that we have received. Empower us to share the Good News that we do not perish because of our Savior Jesus and the faith we have in Him as your Son, our Lord. By the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, we come as your children and as brothers and sisters in the name of Christ Jesus. Amen.

