**Isaiah 53:1-10 Good Friday 2019**

 If I were an outsider looking at the Christian Church, this would be my Good Friday question: “What is it with you Christians and Jesus suffering on a cross? This morning on the front of the newspaper was a grade-schooler from Elizabethtown playacting that he was being crucified! Pictures of kids pretending to get tortured to death? What’s with you Christians and crosses?”

 It’s not just in the newspaper. Every few years around Good Friday I happen to see, and maybe you see it too, a TV news segment where they go to the Philippines. There on the other side of the world, unlike in Elizabethtown, some people actually get crucified. Church members take sanitized nails and drive them through some men’s hands. Then they hang on a cross for a few minutes before getting medical attention.

 Then there was the movie, “The Passion of the Christ.” A true-to-life visual Bible story which had a hard “R” rating. Remember how that upset the applecart back in 2004?

 Look at our churches! In front of and on top of nearly every single Christian church is a cross!

 I’m not being funny here: Usually, this sort of fixation on torture and death is a sign of psychological imbalance. It’s a serial killer sort of thing. And we church-goers regularly take part in it!

 Isaiah chapter 53 clearly states why we again re-live the death of Jesus; why we continue with our Tenebrae services and inch through Jesus’ agonizing six hours on the cross; why we watch one candle after another being snuffed out and find it meaningful. In the middle verses of our reading, verses 5 and 6, we hear ***“He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”***

 One, two, three, four… *seven* times these verses declare Jesus’ death happens because of us. Our sins. Not the world’s, not somebody else’s, ours! We cheated, we lied, we passed by the needy, we gossiped, we complained, we lost our temper. Those are the “little” things that we make excuses for: still sin. And there are the one-offs that we know we can’t make excuses for and that we still feel guilty about: we caused an accident, we struck someone, we publicly humiliated a classmate, we shoplifted.

 God has decreed that every one of those sins, big and little, demands punishment. God is a holy God, and every sin is insubordination against God. “Well,” the unbeliever says, “doesn’t God just forgive it? Isn’t that what you says he does?”

 He forgives, surely, but the physical, scientific laws that rule God’s created world in some way reflect who God is. If you win the lottery, the lottery commission don’t just print a briefcase full of money for you. A lot of people had to hand over their money to you. If you get a free ride scholarship, your professors don’t all get paid $2,000 less. Other students or taxpayers through the government have to pick up your bill. If you file for bankruptcy, the lenders you jilted make up the loss by charging other people higher fees.

 God has decreed that “forgiveness” doesn’t magically make bad thinsg disappear. They still need to be paid for! Every sin demands repayment. That payment is what put Jesus on the cross. Somebody had to pay it. And Jesus did. He willingly died to pay your debt. Isaiah’s prophecy of the Christ makes that clear.

 What is it about the cross? My sin. His sacrifice.

 Do I want to reenact the crucifixion? No. Have I gone to “The Passion of the Christ”? No, nor do I ever intend to. But I understand what Christians who do these things are doing. They in their way are coming to grips with the reasons that Good Friday happened: our sin and Jesus’ self-sacrificing love. They are fascinated by Jesus on the cross, not because they like it, but because they just can’t understand, can’t take it all in, how someone could love people like us enough to suffer hell for us.

 That’s what it is with us Christians and Jesus suffering on a cross.

 Now hear Isaiah who, 700 years before Jesus’ birth, told the world what to expect in our Savior:

***“He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”***