**Matthew 27:45-46**; Passion Reading Mark 14:43-65 March 11, 2015

**How Serious Is Sin?**

“How Serious Is Sin?” We have had kids around a few years and there is a troubling trend. We have always tried to have evening devotions with our children. To help with those devotions, we have used many children’s devotion books and so-called children’s Bibles. One thing sticks out with nearly all of the children’s devotion books, even so-called children’s *Bibles*: they carefully avoid the word sin. I am not sure why they do this. I have my guesses, but no one ever explains that in the front of their books, “Dear Reader, In this children’s Bible we have removed every single usage of the word ‘sin’ because…” No, they never do that. It leads me to think that they don’t think that sin is all that serious.

Such books also carefully avoid mention of eternal punishment in hell. They carefully avoid any connection between our bad actions and Jesus’ death. Even old classics that were in use 50 and more years ago do this.

In a way, we can sort of understand why they do it. These are troubling topics. My sin, my deserved punishment, my causing suffering to Jesus – all are troubling issues. None of them are things I like talking about. But if we, like most children’s devotion books, pretend these things don’t exist, then tonight’s reading makes no sense. In fact, if we cut my sin out of the picture, there is a very big problem. Then Jesus’ crucifixion is just another example of the meaningless violence in this world. There was no reason for it. Then it becomes the same tragedy as a teenager killed by a drunk driver, as an innocent bystander killed by a terrorist. A tragedy to be sure, but nothing more than happens on the average day in this not-so-happy world. This is what happens if sin is not serious.

However, God has always said sin is a serious business.

Before there was sin in the world, Adam and Eve were innocently marveling at God’s brand new shiny creation with wide smiles and eyes full of wonder. God lovingly said to his creations, his children, “Do you see all of this? As your heavenly Father I give all of it to you. You can have all of it from pole to pole, from the Atlantic to the Pacific to the Arctic to the Indian Ocean, every inch of it I give you. Out of all creation I have only reserved one thing, a single tree, for myself. The rest is yours. *You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”* The command was clear, and so was the punishment for disobedience. One thing that we know from even before the beginning of sin is this: sin is very serious to God.

Adam and Eve tried to pretend otherwise. In their human minds they thought that it would be a small thing to disobey. We know the curse that followed. God took his beautiful creation and subjected it to death because of that one sin (Rom 8:20).

Now we can imagine someone smashing his Lego building block creation because he made a mistake and it didn’t turn out right. And we can imagine a painter shredding his work of art if there would be some terrible flaw in his painting. But we cannot imagine the painter dying for his flawed painting, can we?

Yet God decided that he would die for the sin that entered his creation. That is what we have before us this evening. Does that not convey to you some very small idea of how serious sin is?

In the past Wednesday evening services we have seen that process. Jesus was crucified. He prayed for forgiveness for the crucifiers. He took care of the spiritual and physical needs of those around him. Then three hours after he had been crucified we get to tonight’s reading, ***“From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land”*** (45). It was not an eclipse. No, the Passover was held on the first Sabbath after a full moon. We don’t know much about this darkness, except that it was supernatural. It was a sign.

What kind of sign? Many prophets long before had said that the Lord’s judgment would come with darkness. They said that the punished would be thrown into outer darkness. Jesus had repeated those Old Testament descriptions of God’s judgment.

You remember that parable about the servants who were entrusted with money. One was given five talents, another two, another was given one. While the first two servants were faithful, the last one was not. And you remember how he was questioned by his master and how his master sternly judged him, *“Throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”* Here and elsewhere, Jesus tells us that sin is serious. It will be punished. And he connects darkness to this punishment. This darkness at Jesus’ crucifixion is a sign of how Jesus fell under the punishment of sin! Jesus, feeling the punishment we deserved, cried out, ***“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*** The darkness and pain we were to suffer, Jesus suffers on the cross.

How serious is sin? It is so serious we cannot comprehend it. A person who feels suicidal out of a sense of guilt of sin has just begun to understand. Indeed, every sin not only demands punishment, it demands the sort of punishment that Jesus described, ***“My God, why have you forsaken me?”*** Let us read together this hymn verse:

*You who think of sin but lightly,*

*nor suppose the evil great,*

*Here you see its nature rightly,*

*Here its guilt may estimate.*

*Mark the sacrifice appointed;*

*See who bears the awful load—*

*’Tis the Word, the Lord’s Anointed,*

*Son of Man and Son of God. (CW 127:3)*

How serious is sin? It is so serious that not letting children know about sin is actually sin itself. Not mentioning sin is a doctor knowing the disease, and that the said disease has a cure, but refusing to let the patient know the diagnosis. Not talking about the seriousness of sin is the parent who knows that a child is ruining his or her life with bad choices, yet who feels that the parent must let the child make mistakes without a word of warning. It is the mechanic seeing a worn out and useless pair of brake pads, yet ticking the “OK” box on the checklist. It is each of us watching our friends and fellow Christians and unbe-lieving neighbors continue in their ways without raising our voices.

If this evening’s reading does nothing else, it should do two things.

First, it should convince us that sin is the most serious thing in the world. Compared to sin—income, education, personality, status, cell phone, Facebook likes and all the rest are completely meaningless. Sin will be punished as God promised even before it existed.

Secondly, this reading should convince us that Jesus has fully paid the punishment that sin brings. If your observations do not confirm it, then listen to the rest of Scripture: *“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”* (Isaiah 53:5). *“And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood”* (Hebrews 13:12). *“Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God”* (1 Peter 3:18).

The verdict is clear. Sin is deadly serious. And Jesus was so serious about sin that he died so that you are forgiven. Amen.

Abandonment destroys a life. I remember a young man my age at school whose father all of a sudden up and left the entire family. It was completely shocking to everyone. You could see the wounds on that boy. It hurt him. Day after day it hurt him. It created shame. I don’t yet really understand the psychology behind it, but it creates a sense of shame in victims. Why do so many crimes do that? Victims of crime, aside from all the other considerations, one of the things that a great many victims of crime fell is shame. And they should not. They have done nothing wrong, or if they did something wrong, it is almost never in a measure equal to what was done to them. That abandonment not only leaves one with a profound sense of loss, but also with the shame. Like when you go on a roller coaster and your heart is up in your mouth, only unlike a roller coaster your stomach doesn’t go back where it is supposed to be, it just sits there and you feel that way for hours and days on end.

All of that was happening to Jesus at this time.

When we view the victim of abandonment, we feel for them. And so we feel for Jesus. We pity him. But there is something that prevents us from feeling the kind of pity we would with other people. The shame and embarrasment for him falls upon us one moment, but we are conflicted. Another moment we just want to look away because we know why he had to be abandoned, and the reason is me. I am the one who put him there, suffering and abandoned. And so pitying him one moment, I hope that he is not going to look at me because I will realize that not only has the heavenly Father abandoned him, but I too have done so. And while the heavenly Father abandoned him because justice had to be fulfilled, I abandoned him out of selfishness, out of wanting things my way, out of simply wanting things, out of spiritual laziness and a hundred other motives. All of these put Jesus in the position where he is. He had to be abandoned because of me. God the Father had to abandon God the Son because of me. This whole dreadful scene is my fault.