

**“A GOOD Night of Charity and Love”**

John 18:1-19; 42

02 April 2010 ❖ Good Friday ❖ Year C

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus; Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

His name was Ben and he traveled to Haiti in January with his wife, Renee and cousin, Jonathan to teach Lutheran theology to people in Port-Au-Prince. Ben was a fourth year seminary student, the son of two pastors and he had the life-long dream of serving the Lord's church as a pastor...

Well, one day, Ben, his wife and cousin had finished their work and headed back to their hillside guest house, which was the home of 20 Haitian boys rescued from slavery. Soon after they arrived they engaged in their before dinner routine of playing cards. But as we will soon find out, there was nothing routine about that night. You see, in those moments, while sitting on the fourth floor the earth began to shake. Ben's wife and cousin placed themselves between two overhead lights and Ben was steadying himself on a pillar. But then it happened, large pieces of concrete around Ben began to fall; and the concrete was falling right on Ben's head. Renee saw all this and soon realized that Ben was no longer moving and his eyes were closed. Naturally, she yelled for him and started to make her way over to him, but sadly the two floors above them suddenly collapsed and Ben could no longer be seen. Everything went black. Well, after things settled a bit and the aftershocks stopped, Renee and Jonathan noticed a hole in the rubble, in the brokenness. Indifferent about dying at that point and desiring to find her husband, Renee rushed to the hole to see if she could find Ben. Amazingly, when she arrived at the hole she heard him... and he was singing. Now, as Renee recalls, the tune he was singing was from the hymn "When charity and love prevail." Just listen to a few verses from the hymn:

***“Where charity and love prevail, there God is ever found; brought here together by Christ's love, by love are we thus bound.***

***Forgive we now each other's faults as we our faults confess; and let us love each other well in Christian holiness.***

***Let us recall that in our midst dwells God's begotten Son, as members of his body joined, we are in Christ made one. “***

Now, Ben's wife is pretty confident that Ben wasn't singing these words; in fact, being a musician, she is pretty sure he was making it up, but nevertheless we might assume they were on his heart. Shocked at what she heard, Renee yelled to him and prompted him to keep singing. And then, just then she heard this, God's peace to us we pray.” And the singing stopped.

Ben's body was recovered some weeks later. In the darkest moments of Ben's life in his dying breath, one last time, he so wonderfully, sung a message that he believed; a message that expressed truth, comfort and assurance- when all other things seemed to be failing, in the midst of brokenness and separation Ben sang!

And friends isn't that what tonight is all about? When it comes down to it, after the dust settles isn't tonight a night of Charity, love and peace?

Now, surely there is nothing good about remembering the death of a loved one or someone we know or hear about, especially when it is an undeserved death or sudden death. And yet, much like the scene in Haiti, but on a much greater scale that is precisely what we do tonight AND we call it good. Indeed, the scene of that first Good Friday and the days leading up to it were dark, gloomy, ugly and sad... and yet good. The same Jesus

who was thought to be the Messiah was marked as a Criminal, a blasphemer, a phony. And as last night's reading reminded us, just after **Singing a hymn** with his disciples in the upper room, Jesus is led to experience perhaps, the darkest moments of his earthly life. Yes, God's only Son from heaven, experienced anguish in the Garden, was arrested, tortured, and led to die a horrible death on the cross. Friends, There was nothing attractive about that death either, we often down play it, but when it comes down to it, it was gory, bloody and rather inhumane! And yet we call it good, because it couldn't have happened any other way... somebody had to die to mend the brokenness of this World. Somebody had to pay the price of disobedience. Somebody had to die so that death be no more. Somebody had to die so that forgiveness be a guarantee for all repentant sinners. And, yes, someone had to die to defeat sin, death and the devil by rising in victory- demonstrating to the world that God's love and charity prevail- forever. On this Good Friday, we are reminded that there is no life without death.

Our Jesus accomplished all these things and that is why tonight is SO good; surely, living on this side of the resurrection, tonight is really a night of Charity, love and peace. As we fix our eyes on Jesus- we see God, not transfigured in glory, and not celebrating with his disciples, but tonight we see God hanging on the cross in love and charity for the purposes of giving mercy and peace to those condemned by God. That's us, we are the condemned we are the sinners and quite frankly, we are nailing nails into the cross through our continued disobedience, selfishness, and merci-less acts. When it comes down to it, we deserve nothing, and yet tonight we are reminded that we are underserved recipients of some amazing charity and love! We do nothing to receive anything from God, all the work to get his goodness is done- it is finished, its free, and by it we are healed!

The Good news is, despite our corrupt and sinful ways, God opened his hands on the cross so that forgiveness and new life be ours. Moreover, Jesus has passed through life, death, resurrection, ascension into the heavens at God's right hand and as our Lord, He offers us mercy in every situation! HE himself is our peace! And what this means, is that no matter how black, dusty, or sad life may charity and love have overcome all things and Jesus is still with us bringing peace to our every moment.

Friends, maybe just maybe, that why Ben sang in the moments before his death because HE Knew that charity prevailed in Jesus and he knew that in the darkness of his situation there in his midst was God's eternal Son- who redeemed him and called him by name and who opens heaven to all believers. Ben knew he had peace; a peace that was set in motion by way of the cross and sealed in victory on the third day and a peace that would carry him into eternity. And you know, maybe just maybe, those final words that his wife heard were intentional after all... Maybe He was proclaiming the certainty of the Gospel one last time and perhaps he was praying that God direct her eyes to the cross and the grave so that she be comforted and find peace in God as she deal with brokenness and separation.

On this most Sacred and holy Day... this good day we stand in silence to consider the death of our Savior; to consider our Jesus who went willingly like a sheep before the slaughter all for our sake. On this Good Day we stand in solemn awe at the foot of the cross as we consider our sinfulness and what Jesus has done for us. Tonight is a Good night; a good night of charity, love and peace, which have prevail in Christ! And for that we can sing with Ben:

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.