

GOOD FRIDAY
Service of Darkness Commentary

Does it bother you? The crucifix—does it bother you? I don't mean this crucifix. I mean the crucifix the holy evangelists set before us today. Does it bother you? Does it seem too gruesome, too depressing? Does it bother you?

Look at what we've done. We've killed God. Who will be God now? Will you be God? Will I? That may work for a while, but what will we do when God dies, as we all will? We've killed God. Where do we turn now? Shall we cease praying? Shall we surrender all morality since we've crucified absolute Truth? Shall we despair of life and do what God did: die? We killed God. What shall we do?

Look at him. This is not he; this is a representation of that day. Look at him. Close your eyes and look through the lenses of whatever faith you have left. Look at him. Who would believe in him—weak, naked, bloody, covered in spit, sunken and dead? Look at him. There is your God, you Christian. How foolish can you be?

Nietzsche said it long ago and today it is true: "God is dead." And Nietzsche is dead too. And we will be dead soon as well. What a world? Dirt and worms, pine boxes and makeup on a cold, lifeless face.

Does it bother you? Why should it? This what you wanted, isn't it? You got your way. Every thoughtless word, every carnal deed, every wayward thought—this is what you wanted. You killed God. Does it bother you? I don't see why it would.

Aren't translators nice? They've cleaned things up for you. We closed our Service of Seven Words earlier with Hymn 137. We sang in verse 2: "Oh, sorrow dread! God's Son is dead!" But, uh oh, they made your pastor learn German in college, cruel slave drivers that they were. Let me tell you what the German says: "*O grosse Not! Gott selbst ist tot, am Kreuz ist er gestorben.*" In English, "O great sorrow! God himself is dead, on the cross he has died." But that might offend you. That might convict you. That might make you think the unthinkable: we killed God.

Will you smile as you leave? Will you leave the nave in silence but engage in trite chatter in the narthex? Will you say, "Nice sermon, Pastor," and go watch Michigan State as if nothing happened. God died today. Do you care? Will you care? Why should you care? He's dead, what can you do about it?

You can believe. You can believe that God cannot die, that God lives, that although he dies he lives forever, and in him you will live as well. You killed God. It is true. But it is also true that you cannot kill him. He gave up his life. He held himself to the cross—your nails cannot hold God. You killed God, and God let you kill him, that he might never have to kill you, kill you with everlasting death in the fires of hell. You killed him, and it could happen no other way.

"Go!" "Suffer!" "Die!"—these are the words we must yell today. Do not be so naïve as to think they are not, because if he does not go, suffer, and die, he cannot rise, and if he does not rise, you will never rise as well. This is what he was born to do. This is why God became man. God must forsake God. God must punish God. God must hate God, for the Son has become our sin. The Father must hate him with the burning hatred only justice and holiness knows. The Father must look on him in hatred now so that, through him, he can then look on you in love. Look at him, and be ashamed. Be ashamed of him, because he is you, and the worst part of you, the part you do your best to hide. He is your sin.

You are Lutherans, and Lutherans stand and watch today—don't turn your head! We preach Christ crucified, because if he is not crucified, you are not baptized into his death and there is no value in receiving his body and blood. But he was crucified, and you are baptized, and you will receive the very instruments of your salvation for the forgiveness of your sins on Easter: his crucified yet living and life-giving body and blood.

The disciples ran and hid. Do not do that today. Watch. See how ugly your sin is. See how beautiful your Savior's love is. See both those things as your God hangs on your cross. Look at what we've done. Look at what God has done. "*It is finished.*" Amen.